- PlayStation 3
- PlayStation Portable
- PlayStation Network
- PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

OCTOBER 09

The Official Magazine

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

JAMES CAMERON'S NEW **BLOCKBUSTER**

REVEALED FIRST ON PS3

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 24 (October 2009)

AVATAR

THE GAME

The entertainment event of the decade

REVIEWED

CRAZY! Batman: Arkham Asylum
PUNCHY! Dissidia Final Fantasy
BLOODY! Call of Juarez 2

+

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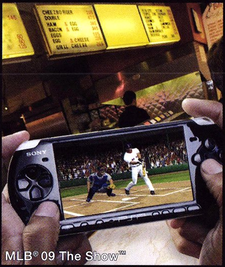
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NBA 10 The Inside

Rockstar Games and Timbaland Present Beaterator

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM RATING PENDING TO MATURE

RP-M

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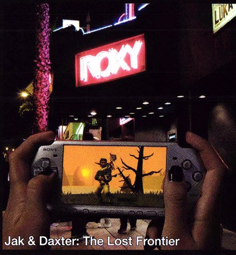
Jak & Daxter: The Lost Frontier

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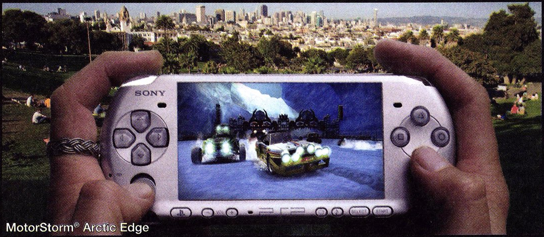
Billy Goat Tavern & Grill
SONY

Fat Princess


SONY
SELECT
START

MotorStorm® Arctic Edge

SONY
MCNABB
CHOOSE A PLAYER TO GIVE AN ASSIGNMENT TO.
PSP

Madden NFL 10

SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo 3

Rosehill Cem
2
Logan Square
2
Downtown
3
SONY
SELECT
START

Gran Turismo®

SONY
SELECT
START

Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines™

SONY
IF YOU WERE ENJOYING A DARJEELING, WHAT WOULD YOU BE SIPPING?
Water
Milk
Champagne
Tea

BUZZ!™ Quiz World

PSP
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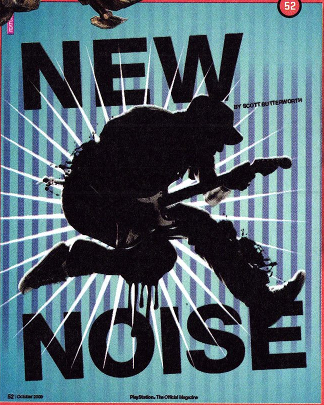
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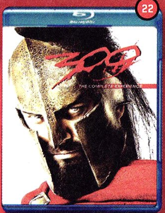
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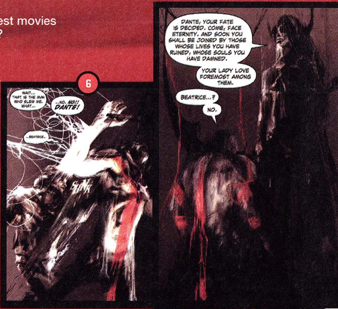
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WAIT... THAT IS THE MAN WHO SLEW ME. WHAT...
...NO, NO!! DANTE!
...BEATRICE...
DANTE, YOUR FATE IS DECIDED. COME, FACE ETERNITY. AND SOON YOU SHALL BE JOINED BY THOSE WHOSE LIVES YOU HAVE RUINED; WHOSE SOULS YOU HAVE DAMNED.
YOUR LADY LOVE FOREMOST AMONG THEM.
BEATRICE...?
NO.

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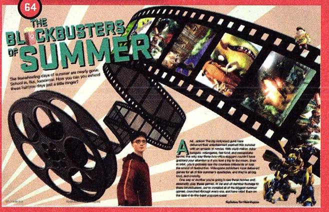
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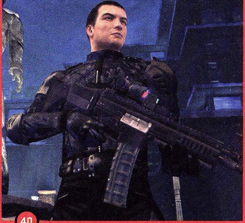
WHATEVER, SIR! LIKENS IS DOWN! WE NEED TO TAKE COVER!
THERE'S TOO MANY OF THESE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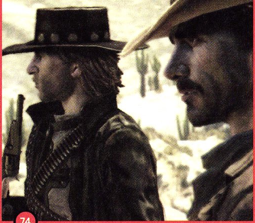
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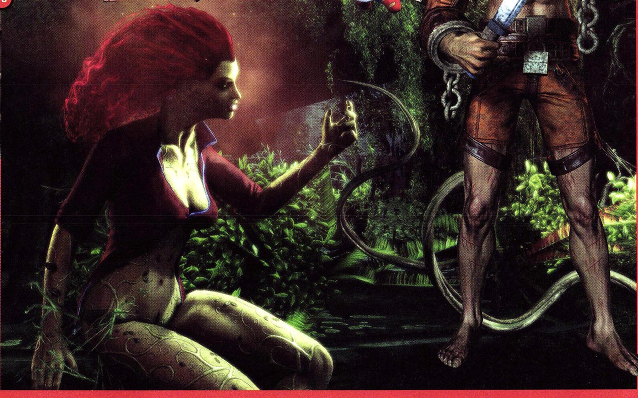

NO [redacted] LIEUTENANT!
HOW ABOUT THIS?
BUDDHA BUDDHA!

Editor's Note

"I apologize for calling your wife a bloated warthog, and I bid you good day."

I'm not sure I ever thought I'd write this particular column. After over 16 years working in videogame magazines, starting on *GB Action* (a Game Boy magazine) in England as a staff writer, this is my last issue on-staff. Yeah, it was as weird as I suspected to type that.

PTOM (and *PSM* before it) has been my home for the past three years and it's been a crazy ride, hitched to the PlayStation 3 wagon as it trundles towards realizing its potential. But I leave at a time when the foundations are in place for a very positive 2010 and beyond. The Who's Who of big franchise names sets the stage for an impressive year when console games will set standards we could barely even imagine back when I started out.

I've been playing games hardcore since 1982 on the Sinclair Spectrum—*Quazatron* (known as *Paradroid* on the Commodore 64) was my all-time favorite—and evolved to the PC in time for *DOOM, The Elder Scrolls: Arena, SimCity 2000,* and more. Even through the mid-'90s push to full-motion video in *Under a Killing Moon* or *Ripper* (Christopher Walken, oh yeah, don't fear the reaper…), it's still hard to imagine that today we'd be able to play games of such depth and quality as *Metal Gear Solid 4, Fallout 3,* and *Killzone 2.* So with the likes of *ModNation Racers* building on *LittleBigPlanet's* social gaming success and a singular powerful adventure in *God of War III,* it seems there's an enticing option for every gaming taste.

> "PTOM has been my home for the past three years and it's been a crazy ride, hitched to the PlayStation 3 wagon as it trundles towards realizing its potential."

PSM
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RESISTANCE 2
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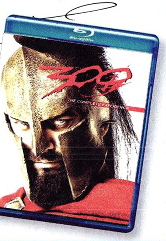
My first game review in a print publication was squinting at Ocean's *Dennis* on that monochromatic Game Boy screen. It was, aptly, a game based on the movie (of the comic character, Dennis the Menace), and illustrates that some themes don't change! This month I got to see the start of a truly revolutionary new era in not just games, but all entertainment. Movie-based games will never be seen again in the same light after *Avatar* stuns audiences when the movie releases in December. As a gamer, you'll have the chance to explore the spectacular world of Pandora in stereoscopic 3D (with the right TV equipment) in advance of the movie's premiere. I hope that when the developers have finished cramming their (and James Cameron's) expansive vision onto the Blu-ray disc that we'll be able to celebrate the breaching of a great new gaming frontier.

PTOM will be here to tell you if that's the case, but I won't be. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to both the mag—and me—over those years, and best wishes to all!

Rob

"Quote" contest

I leave you with a quote—at the top of this page—from my guilty-pleasure favorite movie! Like always, you just need to identify the movie and send your answer in an email to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with the words Ed Note October in the subject line. Someone else will get all the entries, but the winner will still get a random Blu-ray movie from the pile. So final congratulations go to Frederick Kim of Los Angeles, CA, who identified last month's quote from *The Hangover.*



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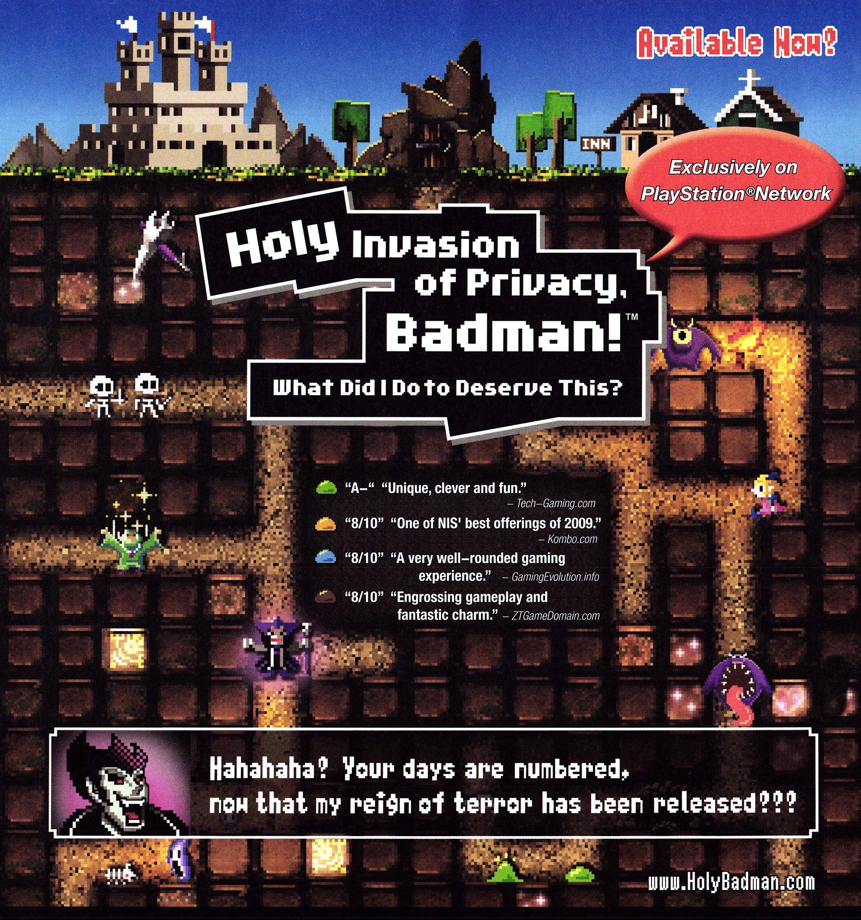

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Hahahaha? Your days are numbered,
now that my reign of terror has been released???

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Mild Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes

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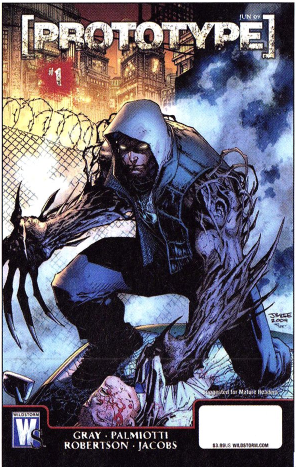
Prototype ►

PUBLISHER: WILDSTORM AVAILABLE: ISSUES 1-4 OUT NOW, 5 (AUGUST), AND 6 (SEPTEMBER)

Prototype is in the hands of some heavyweights of the comic book industry: Written by Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti, with art by Darick Robertson and Matt Jacobs (and the first issue's art drawn by Wildstorm's head honcho, Jim Lee), this comic follows the story of two tough New York cops working to uncover Gentek's secret genetic plan that's just gone haywire across the streets of Manhattan. Well written, funny, and likeable, you'll find a good backstory, crazy scenes of an evil army of pregnant women, a freaky vicious monkey, and Jerry Garcia's long-lost brother!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ROBERTSON · JACOBS
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H-H-HELP...!
HISSS!
dccomics.com

MATURE READERS
KEEP MOVING! IN FORTY MINUTES THIS TOWN WILL BE A PILE OF ASH!
WHAT? WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?
YOU!
RATATATATATATA
THIS MISSION IS CLASSIFIED BLACK. THAT MEANS WE GET THE PACKAGE OR WE'RE ALL DEAD--COPY THAT, GENTLEMEN?
RATATATATATATA

1 COMIC BOOK CONVERGENCE

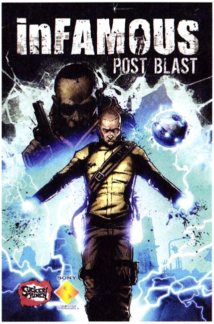
Game and comic publishers get closer. A lot closer

The comic book industry is enjoying a videogame-fueled renaissance, a Sweet 16, a Bar Mitzvah, a Mexican fiesta—and the party has just begun. Whatever you call it, comics and games are more intertwined than ever before. Not only are more videogames being made about comic book characters—Spider-Man, The Hulk, Batman, and Wolverine to name a few—but more comic books are taking root from videogame origins.

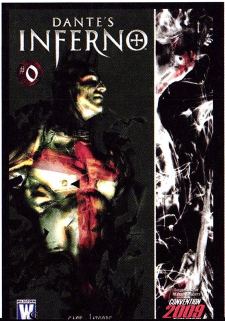
With DC, Marvel, and Dark Horse among the publishers getting into the act, it's DC's Wildstorm imprint that has really embraced games as a resource. For those not aware of Wildstorm's proliferating line of game-related comics, its team-ups include Electronic Arts' original titles *Mirror's Edge* and *Dead Space,* SCEA's *Resistance,* Activision's *Prototype,* and Capcom's new story arc on the ever-popular *Resident Evil.*

This year's San Diego Comic-Con, however, debuted a handful of surprises and was followed by a few more post-conference. SCEA's *God of War, InFamous,* and *Uncharted,* EA's *Dante's Inferno,* and Activision's *Singularity* all revealed comic tie-ins.

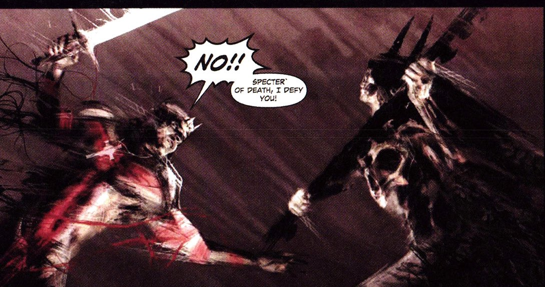
Publishers are exploring the boundaries even further. Not all comics are traditional paperbound books. Some are online, while others are motion comics, like Id's flash-based *Wolfenstein* or Naughty Dog's upcoming *Uncharted.* We wrangled up a handful of past and future comics for your reading pleasure.

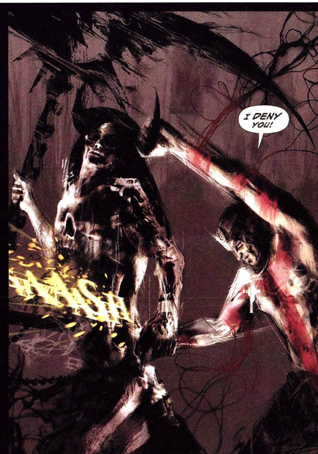


▲ InFamous
PUBLISHER: WILDSTORM
AVAILABLE: NOW
Written by the game's story writer (and former editor at PTOM sister mag, *PC Gamer)* William Harms, with art by Edward Pun and Mike Haney, SCEA's and Sucker Punch's one-off digital comic book chronicles the events of the days following the fateful blast that gave *InFamous* hero Cole McGrath his powers. This digital release was spread out over four issues and is filled with tense writing and artfully drawn using an array of blue hues. Thumbs up!



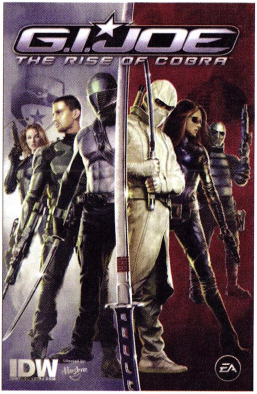
◀ Dante's Inferno
PUBLISHER: WILDSTORM
AVAILABLE: FALL
EA's videogame take on Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* will soon arrive in a six-issue comic book that tells an abbreviated story from Beatrice's viewpoint. Written by Christos Gage with art crafted by Diego LaTorre, the first comic, issued at San Diego Comic-Con, is a dark, surreal affair that follows Beatrice's first ill-considered agreement with the devil. The first issue tries to weave Beatrice's story in with the poem and highlights from the game, an ambitious task for any comic book team.


NO!!
SPECTER OF DEATH, I DEFY YOU!



Wolfenstein Motion Comic

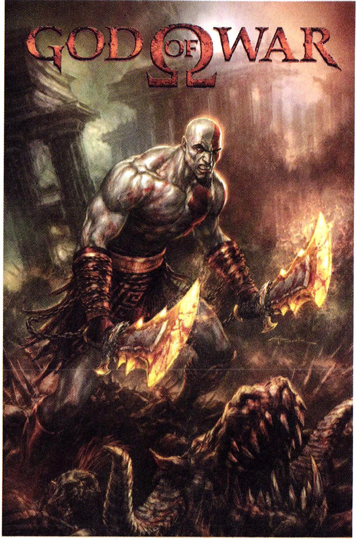
Unlike the traditional paper and staple comic books, Activision has created a series of motion comics that coincide with the game's central story. Lead character B.J. Blazkowicz discovers a powerful amulet that's somehow related to a new German experiment with an inter-dimensional power source called the Black Sun, and each episode chronicles his encounters of said dark experiments with surprisingly entertaining results.



G.I. Joe ►

PUBLISHER: IDW PUBLISHING
AVAILABLE: NOW

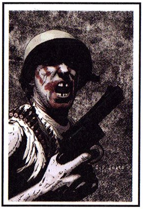
EA worked with writer Brian Reed (who also wrote the game's script) and artist Joe Suitor on two comics—a 12-page pre-launch promotion and a 24-page GameStop exclusive (for pre-orders), which hints at Agent Helix's special talents and origins, and leads into the events that happened after the movie and leading up to the beginning of the game. The writing is surprisingly lean and the art shows deep anime influences, both of which are good things. You'll also find interviews with writer Brian Reed and senior producer Matt Marsala in issue one.

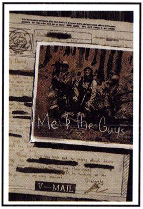


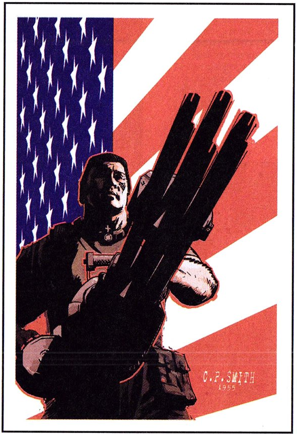
▲ God of War

PUBLISHER: WILDSTORM | AVAILABLE: OCTOBER

A six-issue mini-series to be written by Marv Wolfman *(The New Teen Titans, Crisis On Infinite Earths)*, starts in October and runs into *God of War III's* Spring 2010 release. Neither Sony nor Wildstorm revealed its story plans, but one should expect a side-story that ties into the *God of War II* cliffhanger ending—plus, be prepared for an infinite amount of Greek warrior jibs and blood splattering across the page.







◄ Resistance

PUBLISHER: WILDSTORM
AVAILABLE: NOW

Writer Mike Costa and artist Ramon Perez have crafted an artful, grim look at human life on Earth after the Chimera, an aggressive alien race, has invaded the planet. In this six comic mini-series, you'll follow the special missions of Alpha Team led by Sgt. Capelli and his team as they fight, outmaneuver, and slaughter the Chimera, all while learning individual stories about the characters during the attack and after. The writing is excellent, though the art's heavy style, while generally likeable, often makes human characters hard to discern from one another.

More Where These Came From

As of this writing, we have learned about more comics but we're bound by the ancient comic book oath not to reveal everything…yet. Right at press time it was announced that Activision's time-traveling shooter *Singularity* will get the comic book treatment, and don't be surprised if another big-franchise shooter from the same publisher gets its own comic line later this year. SCEA also has plans to create a comic based on a furry space animal and his robot companion, and Capcom is working on a comic based on its new IP, *Dark Void*.

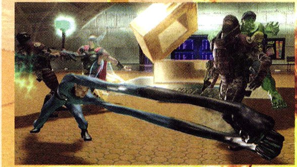
2 MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2

Fusing powers in the build-up to Civil War

What happens when Thor and Deadpool combine their powers? How much damage will that do? What about Wolverine and Iron Man? Green Lantern and Venom? You get the picture, but this hotly anticipated sequel is all about the fusion of powers, creating devastating attacks that supersize the superheroes' (and villains') abilities. The on-screen effect of all the combos we saw was impressive, and was needed as waves of soldiers try to take down the superheroes.

Set before the start of the *Civil War* series, it builds on society's mistrust of the mutants, and weaves a tale involving 24 of the famous characters. You'll get to choose what side to take in the brewing Civil War about a third of the way into the game, and embracing the ultimate alliance title, will be able to mix and match your choice of heroes and villains.

The visuals look really slick, though the screen gets crazy full during fusion powers, making it difficult to see where the character you're controlling is in relation to the various dangers. But *MUA2* is deep. In our demo it showcased a huge array of options and upgrades; characters can reach level 70 and will get to about 30-35 in one playthrough according to the developers. So unlocking all the secrets and powers will require a major time investment. Given the intrigue of the story, the intrinsic delight of co-op (local and online), and improvements to what's already a really solid gameplay mechanism, we're expecting this Civil War-themed battle of superpowers to be one to remember.



Mr. Fantastic + Hulk = Easy thug takedown.

3 TIME BOMB

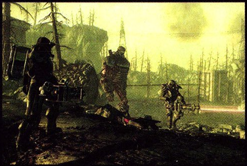
Fallout 3's DLC has been delayed, but the world will still end soon enough

We've got good news and bad news, *Fallout 3* fans. June has come and gone, and as you may have noticed, those downloadable content packs that we announced in our August issue still haven't reached the PlayStation Network. Well, the bad news is that you shouldn't expect to see them until late September. According to the developers, each piece of DLC requires extensive "testing," which of course takes time.

But there is one additional cause for the delay...and it brings us to the good news: in addition to all the new weapons, characters, locations, outfits, and loot, the DLC will also offer new Trophies. No word on how this will impact the existing roster of Trophies, but in theory, you should be able to earn your *Fallout 3* Platinum even without purchasing this new content. So don't fret!

The developers also neglected to mention how this delay would affect the previously announced Game of the Year Edition—a disc-based re-release that would include the original game and all five of the downloadable packs—but they did reveal that the Broken Steel content pack will be released first. This means (assuming you purchase Broken Steel) that your game will no longer end once you reach the conclusion of the storyline and that you'll be able to advance your character all the way to level 30.

The Pitt – Enslave or liberate the local population.



Broken Steel – Join the Brotherhood of Steel!

Operation: Anchorage – Stem the tide of invading communists.

4

AN **RPG** KING

Craving an RPG? BioWare's got you covered

This is the Fade, a dream-like setting from where mages draw their powers. Dangerous creatures lurk in the Fade...

BioWare is RPG royalty, regaled by PC gamers around the world for crafting some of the world's best story-driven games. Dr. Ray Muzyka—co-founder of the company and one of the most intelligent dudes in the games biz—explains why PS3 owners should celebrate BioWare's arrival on our favorite platform.

PTOM: When *Dragon Age: Origins* was first announced it was PC-only. Internally, what made you decide to release it on consoles as well?

Dr. Muzyka: I think we always had a goal of bringing *Dragon Age* to multiple platforms, right from the beginning. We focused on PC as the lead development platform, and then a while ago, we started working *all* the platforms—PS3, Xbox 360, and PC—in parallel. We always thought *Dragon Age: Origins* was the kind of world, the kind of fantasy, the kind of setting and gameplay that would appeal to all kinds of gamers. Also, the Eclipse engine [a brand new engine created for the game] has been designed to be a multi-platform engine—a PC and a console engine simultaneously.

So are there differences between the console and PC versions?

It's the same rich, deep experience for both console and PC—the same number of areas, the same tactics and tactical depth, progression system and customization, and origin stories. Everything you get to do on PC, you get to do on console. And vice versa.

The main thing we're focusing on is optimizing the controls for consoles, making sure they're unique and differentiated and handcrafted. Right now, we're in a really good place; we're tuning all of them. The [game] content is largely done on PC. We're still fixing bugs and tuning, but on the consoles, what we're doing is iterating with usability testing. We're bringing in a dozen people per week, and redoing the testing and tuning the controls on PS3 and making it better and better. And we're optimizing the experience as well, making sure the frame rate is really smooth, and the textures are crisp and really detailed, and so on.

Our goal is to make people who play it on PS3 feel like it was natively developed for the system. Nothing less than that. We want to make them feel they are *the* most important audience when they play that SKU. I think that our attention to the controls—just making sure every detail is perfect for the feel—is going to pay off.

What about DLC? Any differences there?

We haven't locked down the details yet, but our goal is to bring as much post-release downloadable content to as many platforms as possible.

The PC version of *Dragon Age: Origins* will ship with a toolset so fans can create their own mods and stories. Any chance we'll see those user-made mods on the PS3?

We're looking at whether we can take some of the fan-created content from PC and move them over, but a lot of that would involve discussion with first-party manufacturers, too. So there're some details that still need to be worked out.

This is BioWare's first game on the PS3. How has that transition been?

Going to any new platform is always challenging. You have to think about the audience for the

Dr. Ray Muzyka 411

JOB: General Manager and CEO at BioWare Corp. Co-founded BioWare with Dr. Greg Zeschuk. Also, General Manager and Vice President at Electronic Arts. Whew, what a list!

EDUCATION: MBA from Ivey School of Business (University of Western Ontario), MD and MBSc from the University of Alberta

PREVIOUSLY WORKED ON: *Shattered Steel, Baldur's Gate, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, Neverwinter Nights, Mass Effect*

FASCINATING FACT: Muzyka is a bona fide doctor. Honest! After med school, he did emergency medicine for 10 years. But while his first two years of doctoring were full-time, he eventually practiced less and less because he didn't have time...because he was busy making videogames! Now that's passion. These days, his medical knowledge has become, as he describes it, "cocktail party trivia."

To defeat baddies, you'll have to utilize teamwork. You'll want a tank to keep the monster off vulnerable spellcasters.

That corpse on the floor is the best healer in the game. But you have to make choices in *Dragon Age,* and in this case, you appeased a member of your party by killing the old woman.

platform and make sure you're delivering something that's really high quality relative to everything else that's available.

There are a lot of great games being developed for PS3. E3 this year just blew me away, going to the Sony booth, because there's a lot of great content there, like *Uncharted 2.* Great game. Deserved all its awards, I think, so did a lot of other games. Like the new *Ratchet & Clank* game…the Insomniac guys always do a good job, so I have a lot of respect for the developers on that platform.

And is it challenging [to develop for PS3]? Yeah! It's a different architecture so there are unique challenges. I think the audience has similar needs and desires in terms of wanting certain kinds of gameplay. So, you have to embrace that.

Plus, you have to adapt to the memory usage. Unlike PC, which sort of has unlimited memory usage, in some ways, you have to make sure your texture optimization is right and you're streaming things optimally. You just have to step back and prioritize everything again. Once you figure out how to do that, it's not too bad.

We have some people that are really excited to be working on PS3 at BioWare. The team was, like, giddy to get some of the systems into the office a while ago. They're just playing with them, and having fun, and more and more people are like, "Hey, can I get a piece of that? I'd love to do that, too," so it's a fun system to work on.

Congratulations on your new position as the head of Electronic Art's RPG/MMO group! Now that BioWare and Mythic are under the same umbrella, is there any chance we'll see some of Mythic's games (*Warhammer, Dark Age of Camelot*) come to the PS3?

We haven't announced any plans. We always have a goal of trying to bring our content to as diverse an audience as possible, but at the same time, we recognize that some games are really attuned well for certain audiences, so both answers are possible depending on which specific game we're talking about.

Now, you guys have the PC/Xbox exclusive trilogy, *Mass Effect.* Any plans to release a similar exclusive for the PS3?

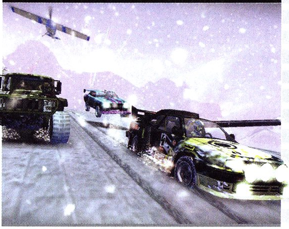
We haven't announced anything and until we do, it's an open question. But I can see doing more things on PS3 in the future. I won't say we will or won't. It's an opportunity we'd consider if everything fit right.

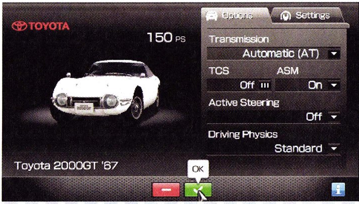
5 POWER TO THE PORTABLE

The PSP's future is looking as bright as its beautiful screen

Between the reveal of the PSPgo, the announcement of several new entertainment packs, and a game line-up brimming with big-name franchises, Sony's portable is gaining more momentum than a Ratchet-piloted hover-board. Whether you're a UMD-hoarding early adopter or a handheld holdout anxious to grab a 'go and fill it with downloads, the horizon's looking especially bright for PSP owners. From established franchises such as Kojima's classic stealth/action series to a brand new IP featuring portly princesses, a solid slate of first- and third-party entries is promising to keep on-the-go-gamers' thumbs twitching well into 2010 and beyond. Like Kratos' Blades of Chaos, we expect our PSPs will be permanently attached to us thanks to these must-have titles.

MotorStorm: Arctic Edge The only thing that'd make *MotorStorm's* edge-of-your seat racing even more intense is a trip to Alaska; thankfully, *Arctic Edge* delivers, taking adrenaline junkies on a rugged, ice-covered trek through the frigid region's most brutal terrain. In addition to pop-off-the-screen visuals, *MotorStorm*'s PSP debut also features deep vehicle customization and eight-player online white-knuckle competitions. Better buckle up...and pack a jacket!





150 PS

Transmission: Automatic (AT)

TCS: Off

ASM: On

Active Steering: Off

Driving Physics: Standard

Toyota 2000GT '67

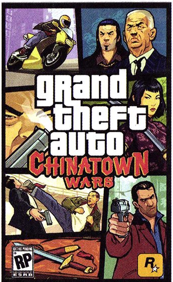
Grand Turismo PSP Teased since the original PSP was announced, gaming's premier racing sim finally cruises onto the portable system. Featuring over 800 cars, tons of tracks and modes—including infrastructure multiplayer—this one puts a full-on *Gran Turismo* experience in the palm of your hand. Running at 60 fps, and sporting some of the best visuals to ever grace the PSP's slick screen, doesn't hurt its pedal-to-the-metal appeal, either.

LittleBigPlanet PSP Just 30 seconds of navigating Sackboy on a PSPgo, and we were in love; even on the PS3, *LBP* looked like a perfect fit for on-the-go fun, so it's no surprise this one's at the top of our must-play list. Adopting the series' "Play, Create, Share" motto, *LBP PSP* is a complete—and completely new—adventure. Those satisfied with Sackboy's pre-made solo campaign, as well as the creatively-inclined looking to build their own platformer around the burlap bag-sporting "Little" guy, will find lots to love in this take-anywhere entry.

Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny The weapons-based brawler finally battles its way onto the PSP with the characters, modes, and arenas that's made it a console contender ever since it came out swinging on the Sega Dreamcast. Brutal finishers and the series' signature Soul Crushes also ensure the pain pops right off the screen. Oh, and did we mention *God of War's* Athenian ass-kicker Kratos is on the roster?

FAT PRINCESS
FISTFUL OF CAKE

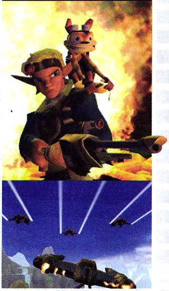
Fat Princess: A Fistful of Cake Besides having one of the best subtitles we've heard in a while, this spin-off of the PlayStation Network's princess-feeding take on classic competitive multiplayer gaming will contain as much, if not more, content than the original. That means plenty of portable class hat-switching, princess fattening, and colorful skirmishes. Additionally, a more fleshed out solo experience promises to be the icing on the... Well, you know.

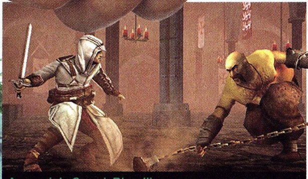


Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars Fans of *Grand Theft Auto Liberty City* and *Vice City Stories* might think they've fully experienced a Rockstar open-world romp on Sony's portable, but they're yet to tread the bullet-riddled path of troubled triad member Huang Lee. His twisted tale through *Chinatown Wars* features the expected colorful characters and car-jacking, ho-slapping, cop-capping gameplay spread over a richly detailed 3D Liberty City.

Ready to go? We're pretty certain all these games will be available as downloads for the new handheld, as well as on UMD. ►

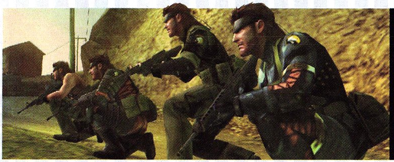
Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier While many are still wondering what the heck an Ottsel is, we've just been curious where Jak and Daxter have been this console generation. Thanks to High Impact Games, the folks behind the excellent *Ratchet & Clank* entries on the PSP, the mystery's been cracked; they're back in *The Lost Frontier,* a title sporting graphics and gameplay as impressive as any of their previous PS2 adventures. Creative weapons, cool airships, and an engaging story complement the out-of-this-world antics of one of gaming's favorite duos.





Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines This sequel to Altair's console debut has got the PSP firing on all cylinders, offering not only some of the crispest visuals we've ever seen on the system, but amazingly dynamic gameplay that doesn't skimp on the robed hero's acrobatics or ass-kicking. A rich narrative directly following the events of the original also has us anxiously eying this one like a thief in the night.

Star Wars Battlefront: Elite Squadron While it's been years since we've gotten a new console entry in the *Battlefront* series, the franchise has enjoyed critical and commercial success on the PSP. Building on 2007's *Renegade Squadron, Elite* brings back the epic Rebel-vs.-Empire skirmishes, but also allows blaster-toting gamers to span the galaxy, literally, as on-foot battles can now lead to dogfight duels in the stars.

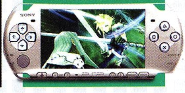


Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker This Kojima written, produced, and directed entry delves deep into Big Boss' back story; following the events of *Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater,* fans will be treated to the most complete portable *MGS* experience to date. While you'd have a better chance finding nicotine patches on Solid Snake than digging up details on this one, *Peace Walker* is expected to include the stealth/action gameplay, quirky characters, and twisty narrative that's defined the series. That, and some cardboard boxes to hide in.

Bundles of Joy

The PSP Entertainment Pack is Back

From Greek god-slayers to tween pop stars, the PSP's popular entertainment packs have featured various demographic-spanning favorites, ensuring game fans of all stripes and skill levels can crash the portable party. But Kratos' blood red and Hannah Montana's lilac PSPs were just the beginning; soon, *Assassin's Creed* and *Final Fantasy* fans will also get their very own dedicated bundles. The ***Dissidia Final Fantasy*** entertainment pack, featuring a "mystic silver" PSP-3000, not only includes the fight-focused new entry in Square Enix's beloved RPG series, but also a UMD copy of *FF* film *Advent Children.* While *Fantasy's* faithful following get a package even Sephiroth could love, Altair's supporters also get something worth sinking their blades into. Bundled with a "piano black" PSP-3000, the ***Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines*** entertainment pack features the blade-baring badass' first adventure on the portable, complete with console quality gameplay and an all-new tale picking up right after the events of the first game. Whether you want to wield the sharp steel of young, spiky-haired heroes or stealthy cloaked killers, these upcoming packs have got your back.

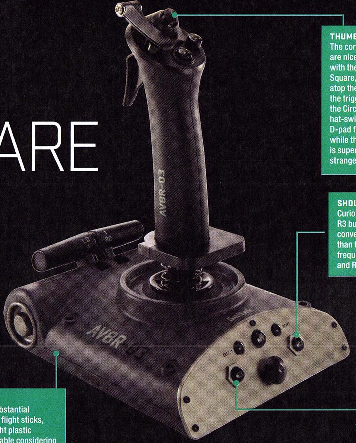


6 HARDWARE

Saitek Aviator Flight Stick for PS3

MSRP: $49.99 | Website: www.saitekusa.com

Saitek has a reputation for quality controllers in the PC realm, but while the Aviator Flight Stick is a nice value-priced performer, it does have some questionable design elements that reveal it was converted, rather than purpose-built, for the PS3. Perhaps the most curious layout decision was the exclusion of the L1 and R1 buttons from the standard control scheme. Instead there's a Mode switch on the side of the unit that has to be flipped to access an alternate remapping of the buttons that includes the top shoulder buttons—hardly intuitive, and very inconvenient when games require frequent L1/R1 usage. The five-foot USB cord also seems better suited for a desktop PC than a PS3 that might reside across a living room. But when the Aviator is paired with a game its optimized for (like *Tom Clancy's HAWX)* or that suits its rigid layout scheme, its smooth and precise control is a joy to use.



THUMBS UP
The core face buttons are nicely packaged with the Triangle, Square, and X buttons atop the stick and the trigger serving as the Circle button. The hat-switch accesses D-pad functions, and while the safety cover is superfluous, it is strangely cool.

SHOULDER SHRUG
Curiously, the L3 and R3 buttons are more convenient to access than the far more frequently utilized L1 and R1 buttons.

SOLID FOOTING
While we miss the more substantial feel and heft of Saitek's PC flight sticks, the PS3 Aviator's lightweight plastic construction is understandable considering its nice price point. What it lacks in heft, it makes up for with a wide, stable base.

R.D.S. Industries PSP200 Deluxe Travel Case

MSRP: $29.99 | No URL available

The PSP200 case is ideally suited for PSP-owning travelers or pack rats who aren't content unless they're carrying every last PSP-related doodad they own. Lengthwise, the case basically mirrors the PSP's size, but widthwise, it's a fat 3.5-inches. The upside is that there are three separate zippered pockets: the rear compartment has four UMB slots and room for headphones, remote control, and additional Memory Sticks; the middle section is intended for the AC adaptor, power cord, and extra batteries; and the front pocket holds the PSP system. The PSP slot seems specifically designed for the PSP Slim, but will hold earlier versions of the system, albeit very snuggly. The heavily padded case features superb construction with the thin, but adequate, handle being the only slight qualitative downgrade. The only real question for PSP owners is: Do you prefer to travel light or fully equipped?

Audi(g)o

Getting sound from your PSP to your ears can occur in a variety of styles and colors and to varying degrees of effectiveness. We put three options through rough-and-tumble real-world tests and listened to the results.

Airdrives FIT Interactive Earphones

PRICE: $49.99
WEBSITE: www.airdrives.com

If you listen to music on your PSP while doing anything remotely energetic then consider this outside-the-ear device. The simple loop wraps around your ear and the speaker then sits comfortably enough for you to hear clearly when it's quiet. A volume control on the cord is handy, the sound is crisp, and it definitely lets you hear other external sounds around you. But while the earphones are undoubtedly comfortable for long listening sessions, they're practically inaudible in louder environments like noisy public transport.

🔊 Great for listening to an audio book on a tranquil beach; cycling along calm country roads.

🔇 Automobiles / Planes / Trains

2XL Spoke WreckingBall

PRICE: $14.99
WEBSITE: www.2xl.com

Jam these fairly comfortable silicon plugs down your eardrums and block out all ambient sounds so you can focus on games/tunes/movies/poetry readings/etc. Three interchangeable plugs can be clipped on to the speaker part to fit every inner ear shape, and that's what constitutes "noise isolating" in these colorful earphones. 2XL's range is all choices to suit your style, and for $15 they're an effective way to gear your earphones to your tastes. The sound itself is solid, and the plug effect means you hear your source above even loud ambient noise.

🔊 Plug effect blocks out ambient noise

🔇 Plastic crammed in your ear for extended periods isn't too comfortable

2XL Ratio Grills

PRICE: $9.99
WEBSITE: www.2xl.com

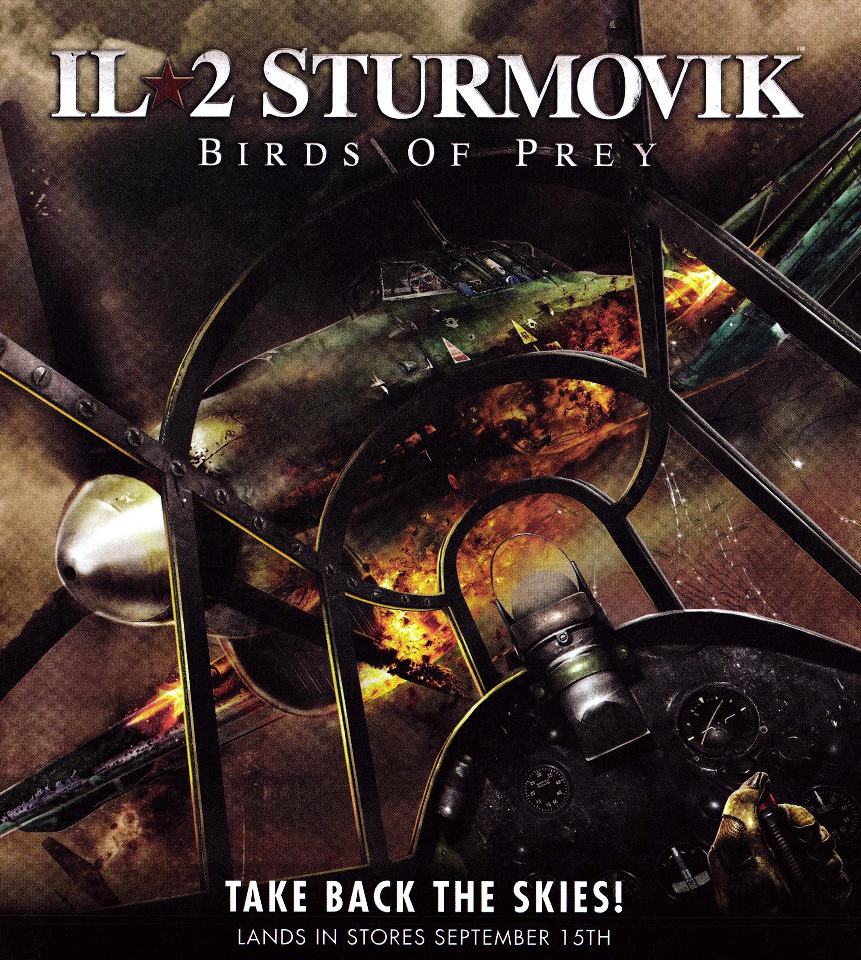
Want to add a little bling to your aural decoration? These 15mm buds (larger than the 10mm Spokes) produce consistent sound levels and are decent all-round performers. Like the Spokes, it has no volume control on the headset itself, but what do you expect for $10? You expect style, which you can show off with a variety of available colors and patterns. These buds are comfortable enough and suitable for most casual situations but won't drown out louder noises like construction or the patter of train tracks.

🔊 All-around cheap option in a variety of colors

🔇 4-foot cord, decent sound, affordable performer

IL★2 STURMOVIK™

BIRDS OF PREY


TAKE BACK THE SKIES!

LANDS IN STORES SEPTEMBER 15TH

PS3 PSP XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE NINTENDO DS Gaijin Entertainment 1C COMPANY 505 GAMES

TEEN
T
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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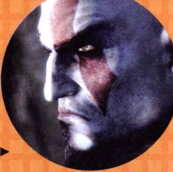
7 THE A LIST

The latest on the greatest coming to PS3

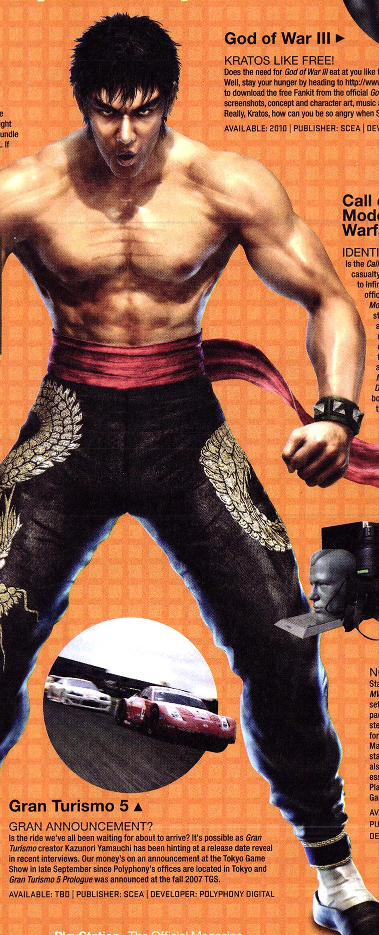


God of War III ▶

KRATOS LIKE FREE!

Does the need for *God of War III* eat at you like the need for vengeance eats at Kratos? Well, stay your hunger by heading to http://www.godofwar.com/downloads.html to download the free Fankit from the official *God of War* website. The kit includes screenshots, concept and character art, music and sounds, the logo and font, and more. Really, Kratos, how can you be so angry when Sony Santa Monica is so generous?

AVAILABLE: 2010 | PUBLISHER: SCEA | DEVELOPER: SONY SANTA MONICA

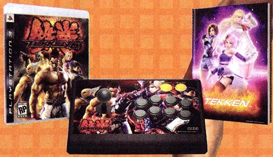


Tekken 6 ▶

STICK-ER SHOCK

The big four gaming retailers—Best Buy, Amazon, GameStop, and Game Crazy—are at it again, offering the *Tekken 6* Limited Edition Wireless Fight Stick Bundle for their new favorite price point: $149.99. The premium bundle includes the game, a collectible art book, and a Hori *wireless* fight stick. If you do your shopping at GameStop, you'll also receive the Samurai downloadable content pack with any *Tekken 6* pre-order.
Use the Samurai pack to access additional character customization options and Penny Arcade's official Cardboard Tube Samurai outfit for Yoshimitsu.

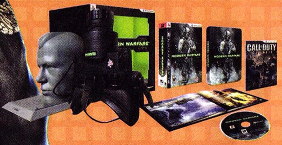
AVAILABLE: OCTOBER 27 | PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI DEVELOPER: NAMCO BANDAI



Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 ▶

IDENTITY CRISIS

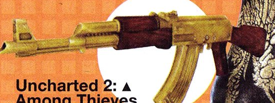
Is the *Call of Duty*-tag a casualty of war? According to Infinity Ward's website the official title of the follow-up to *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* is a lean, mean, and stripped down *Modern Warfare 2*. But when a marketing study indicated that consumer name recognition plummeted 20-percent once *Call of Duty* was dropped from the title, Activision performed an about-face and decreed that *CoD* be reunited with its *MW2* unit. The final outcome? The *Call of Duty*-tag will appear on the standard SKU box, while the special edition SKUs will bear the naked *Modern Warfare 2* moniker.



NOCTURNAL MISSIONS

Stalkers rejoice! The highlight item of *CoD: MW2's* Prestige Edition is a fully functional set of Night Vision Goggles! The collector's package also includes the game in a special steelbook case, an art book, a PSN voucher for the original *Call of Duty* game, and a Soap MacTavish bust which also serves as a display stand for the NVG—all for $149.99. There's also a Hardened Edition for $79.99 that is essentially the Prestige Edition sans goggles. Place those pre-orders ASAP at Best Buy, GameStop, or Amazon.

AVAILABLE: NOVEMBER 10
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: INFINITY WARD



Uncharted 2: Among Thieves ▲

LOADED DOWN

Pre-order treasures aren't just for those willing to drop a Benjamin or two on collector's editions. Four retailers—Best Buy, Amazon, GameStop, and Game Crazy—are offering downloadable exclusives for *Uncharted 2* pre-orders:

BEST BUY – Gaming fashionista will want to accessorize for multiplayer sessions with gold versions of the Beretta handgun and AK-47 assault rifle.

AMAZON – *Hidden* Treasure?! Hah! Not when you've got an exclusive treasure map.

GameStop – Consider yourself a multiplayer VIP with first access to the MP demo and instant access to the Revenge Booster unlockable.

GAME CRAZY – Mo' money, mo' money, mo' money! The multiplayer Currency Multiplier will let you acquire currency and unlock bonuses faster.

AVAILABLE: OCTOBER 13
PUBLISHER: SCEA
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG

Gran Turismo 5 ▲

GRAN ANNOUNCEMENT?

Is the ride we've all been waiting for about to arrive? It's possible as *Gran Turismo* creator Kazunori Yamauchi has been hinting at a release date reveal in recent interviews. Our money's on an announcement at the Tokyo Game Show in late September since Polyphony's offices are located in Tokyo and *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue* was announced at the fall 2007 TGS.

AVAILABLE: TBD | PUBLISHER: SCEA | DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL

BECAUSE BOMB-SNIFFING DOGS DON'T WORK WELL UNDERWATER.

It locates and destroys underwater mines at the command of an operator who's nowhere in the vicinity. And it's just one example of the cutting-edge technology you'll be able to get your hands on when you become a proud part of the U.S. Navy. To learn more, visit navy.com or call 1-800-USA-NAVY.

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8 ELEGANT ARTISTRY

Final Fantasy artist **Yoshitaka Amano** is one of the revered franchise's visual vanguard. We speak with him about his work and inspirations.

Who would've thought that Yoshitaka Amano, the visionary artist behind *Final Fantasy's* game logos—and much of the series' early character designs—has never played any of the games he's worked on? Odd, yet true! We spoke to Amano-san as he celebrates his new exhibit at the inauguration of the New People complex in San Francisco's Japantown, which features cutting-edge works of Japanese film, music, and art.

PTOM: How would you describe your art style? What materials do you use most in your artwork, especially your *Final Fantasy* pieces?

Yoshitaka Amano: I've been influenced by so many artists that it's hard to describe my style. For games, my goal is to create images that can inspire the players' own imaginations. Almost all illustrations for games are done with watercolor on paper.

My solo exhibition [opening August 15th at New People's Superfrog Gallery] will be totally different from my past work. When I was a child, I was greatly influenced by American comic books and pop culture. If you have seen my series like *Gatchaman, Time Bokan,* and *Yatterman,* you'll recognize this immediately. Starting with the traditional animal caricatures, Japanese culture has uniquely influenced today's anime and manga. I feel that my current work is nurtured by both of these key elements.

At this exhibition at the Superfrog Gallery, I would also like to show my gratitude for the inspiration America has given me for each of my works.

What inspires you when you're working on *Final Fantasy* and other video-game art? How much of it is your own inspiration and how much of it is based on what the developers want?

The basic inspiration comes from the scenario of the game itself. I often add things that are not in the initial setting and it seems to work, and thus broaden and enrich the world the game is set in. I'd say 40-percent comes from me and 60-percent from the original idea.

How would you say your art has changed from your first *Final Fantasy* illustration to your more recent ones?

No change at all on my part. However, the advancement of computer technology has been incredible and I've been constantly amazed by it.

How long does it take you to create a piece of artwork, such as the *Final Fantasy* game logos?

Well, that's kind of a corporate secret. If the game companies think I work very fast, they may start asking for discounts! In the case of work like the *Final Fantasy* logos, I create many drafts, taking a couple of minutes for each one, then choose and refine the design.

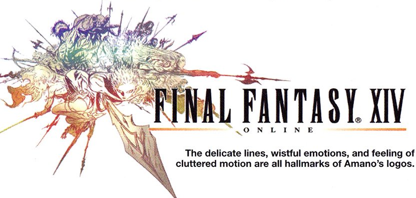
Do you play games? If so, what are some of your favorites?

The only games I've actually played are on the Nintendo Wii. I never really played any of the other game systems.

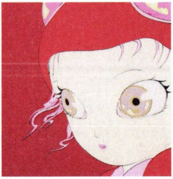
Where can PlayStation gamers in the United States find more of your artwork?

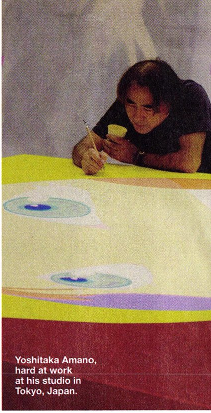
The first compilation of *Final Fantasy* works, *DAWN,* was just published by Dark Horse Comics recently. Dark Horse is also working on the complete *Final Fantasy* works, *SKY,* which will hit the U.S. market towards the end of this year.

The works I plan to present at my opening are more like independent art works and not necessarily related to games, but it'll be a fun show with a panel discussion and an autograph session (it'll be my only visit to the U.S. this year) and I hope people in the U.S. will enjoy it.

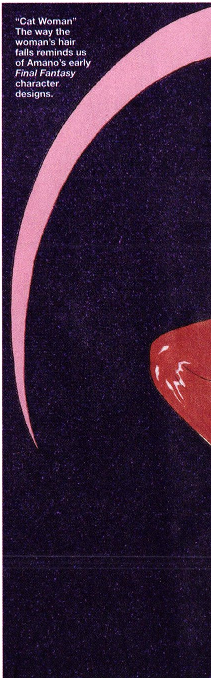


The delicate lines, wistful emotions, and feeling of cluttered motion are all hallmarks of Amano's logos.

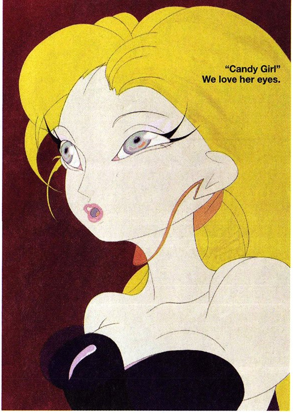


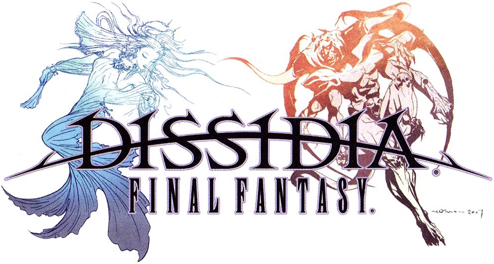


Yoshitaka Amano, hard at work at his studio in Tokyo, Japan.

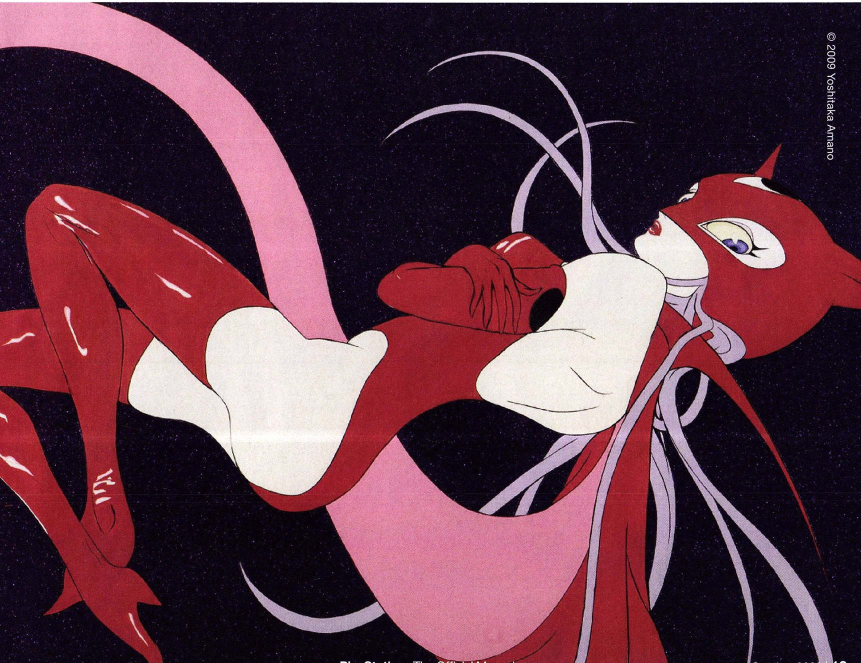


"Cat Woman" The way the woman's hair falls reminds us of Amano's early *Final Fantasy* character designs.


"Candy Girl"
We love her eyes.


DISSIDIA
FINAL FANTASY.

> "For games, my goal is to create images that can inspire the players' own imaginations."


© 2009 Yoshitaka Amano

9 HOW TO:

Upgrade your PS3 hard drive

Whether you're at 20, 60, 80, even the newer 160GB hard drive sizes, if you're taking full advantage of your PS3—using it to stream or play video and music, as well as keep all your games installed—you'll be out of space soon. This is how you upgrade, and it's easier than you think.

As a famous intergalactic book once said on the cover in big, friendly words: Don't Panic! You just need a 2.5-inch SATA Notebook drive—we're using a Seagate Momentus 500GB, 8MB cache, 5400rpm to boost our capacity. Just follow these instructions for more digital elbow room. ➔

Seagate
SATA
2.5"
MOMENTUS
500GB

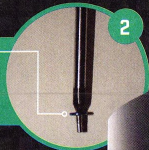
Before you start

Copy all your save data from your PS3. Go to the Game tab on the XMB, save games, and hit Triangle to copy them to an external hard drive (that's been formatted as FAT32) or USB flash drive. It might take a while. Also, copy any other files you may have that only reside on your PS3—music, video, photos.

Don't worry about your PSN ID or other information, as that's stored on the PS3's internal flash memory.

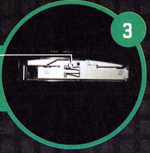
Now comes the fun part

1 Pop off the hard drive cover. Easily done with a fingernail. If you've recently lost those, a small screwdriver will help.

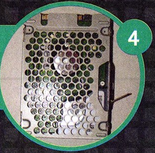


2 That's the awkward little bugger Remove the blue screw. It requires a Philips screwdriver.

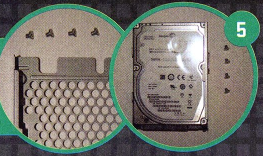
NOTE/BE WARNED/ALERT: It's easy to strip the screwhead! Be very, *very* careful.



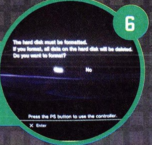
3 Lift the small handle and pull the hard drive to the side (NOT UP), to detach it from its connectors. Now lift it up to remove it from the PS3.



4 You need to remove four screws that secure it in the docking bay. To avoid *stripping*, press down and turn to the left (lefty loosey, righty tighty) slowly until you hear a soft "click" as it loosens, then remove.



5 Slide the new drive into the docking bay. It only fits one way (to align the screw holes with the holes in the bay), then slot back into the PS3. Slide it back into place (so the main screw hole is visible again in the center). Replacethe plastic cover.



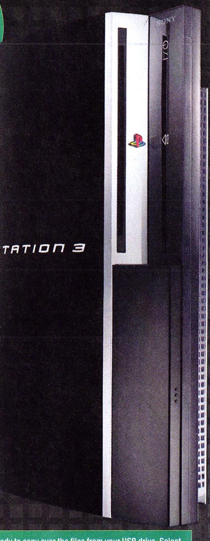
The hard disk must be formatted.
If you format, all data on the hard disk will be deleted.
Do you want to format?

6 Power on and you'll be asked to format the drive. Select Yes, then select Yes to the terrifying notion everything will be deleted. Our formatting of a 500GB drive took about 16 seconds.

7 Now you're ready to copy over the files from your USB drive. Select Save Game and USB drive (assuming that's what you're using) and then hit Triangle, then select Copy. Where each file save to the USB took several minutes (for the larger files, like *MLB 09: The Show*) each one took seconds copying to the hard drive.

Now highlight the Trophy Collection icon. WHHHAAAAAT?! Nothing, right? You need to sign-in again, but your PSN ID is stored on the PS3 flash memory, so no need to re-enter. You just need to wait a while as it syncs, and you'll feel like a real PS3 gamer again!

Check your new Hard Drive capacity by going to System Settings in the System tab on the XMB. Ours registered 413GB free/465GB—a little better than the 60GB we were playing with previously. Sure, you'll need to sit through a few game reinstallations and update downloads, but what's that between you and a new souped up PS3 ready to handle all the games, video, music, and picture media you can throw at it…until the 2TB drives, coming in 2012 (or thereabouts).



THE BURNING QUESTION

10

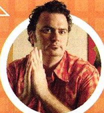
This month, we asked: What's the coolest promotional item that's ever been produced for one of your games?

Randy Pitchford

GEARBOX SOFTWARE, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

"We have had a lot of really cool items created for *Brothers in Arms* and other titles, but right now, there is this guy creating an actual vehicle found in *Borderlands.* This guy, Phillip Mainprize, is building a real-life, working replica of a vehicle found in the game. A real-life car. One that actually works. That is freaking cool. Plus, it's really speaks to the level of art design in the game. To be able to say that a screenshot or video of a single vehicle from *Borderlands* inspired someone to actually create a replica of it is a testament to our team."

Our take: So we can take it for a test drive when it's done, right Randy?



Tim Schafer

DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

"I always wanted a floaty pen for *Monkey Island,* but we never made one. I even made a little mock up of *[Monkey Island* hero] Guybrush in the coffin boat floating through the voodoo swamp. But no. I was so mad when *Sam & Max* got them."

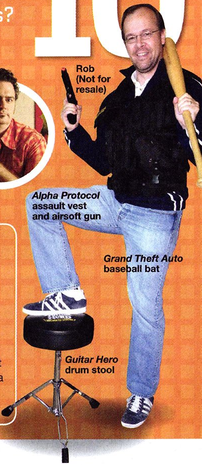
Our take: It's never too late, Tim! We now expect a *Brütal Legend* floaty pen. Wait, that doesn't fit so well, does it? A *Brütal Legend* axe, however...

Pete Hines

BETHESDA SOFTWORKS,VICE PRESIDENT

"For a press event we did to unveil *Fallout 3,* we gave out Vault-Tec lunchboxes (similar to the ones we did for the Collector's Edition) that had a Vault Boy bobblehead, a bottle of Nuka Cola, and the famous *Fallout 3* ringer T-shirt with the 101 on the back that everyone still hounds us to sell to the public to this day. That was definitely the best one. Also, at PAX in 2008, we gave out Vault Boy puppets to folks at the show in conjunction with the *Fallout* comic that Penny Arcade did for us. You can find videos online of people having a blast with those things at the final Omegathon event. Hilarious."

Our take: Wait, those shirts are valuable? Quick! To eBay!


Rob (Not for resale)
Alpha Protocol assault vest and airsoft gun
Grand Theft Auto baseball bat
Guitar Hero drum stool

ETCETERA

All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from our work—because sometimes we need to level-up in the real-world, not just digital ones.

Carrie Fisher | Theater | $50

You can't mention Carrie Fisher without thinking Princess Leia. Rob wonders what that link would do to a person. "Thanks George Lucas, you ruined my LIFE," Ms. Fisher exclaims in "Wishful Drinking," a stand-up recounting of her all-too-eventful life. From her birth into Hollywood royalty to her gay friend dying in her bed just a few months ago, she spins a consistently hilarious tale. Yeah, theater, we're getting classier here at PTOM Towers... Even if it includes bawdy commentary about that slave girl statue that, if you look closely enough, reveals...

Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince | Movie | $10

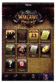
Not highbrow enough for live theater, Roger headed to the neighborhood Cineplex to take in the latest *Potter* movie with the rest of the commoners. While he reports that the new flick is probably the best of the film series and does a fine job of recounting the storyline, he was disappointed that the epic battle that concludes the book was curiously downscaled for the movie. C'mon Hollywood, aren't you supposed to make everything bigger and louder?

CIVILWAR | Album | $10

The band Dillinger Four is near and dear to Scott's heart, but when this album came out nearly 10 months ago, he heard distant rumblings of mediocrity. "It's too slow," the Internet collectively cried. "It's too poppy!" Well, now that he's finally gotten around to buying it, he's decided that the Internet was, as per usual, wrong. Well, mostly wrong. The album *is* slower and a bit more poppy than their older work, but it's also some of their catchiest and most thoughtful music to date. And for just $10, why not check it out?

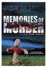
Tango: Zero Hour | Album | $18.98

The longer Carlos the Intern works with us, the more we learn of his idiosyncrasies. This month's revelation? Carlos grooves to life with a running soundtrack to embellish his real-world adventures. He's currently hooked on *tango nuevo* master Astor Piazzolla's Tango: Zero Hour. According to Carlos, if there's suspense and intrigue, put on "Concierto para Quinteto." If you're relaxed it's "Milonga Del Angel," but when someone's on your tail [?!] put on "Contrabajisimo."



World of Warcraft Mobile Armory | iPhone app | Free

While Carlos scores real-world adventures, Teresa heads to Azeroth. The latest addition to her questing arsenal is Blizzard's new *WoW*-resource iPhone app. "Tweak my paladin's spec on the go? Spy on guildmates during my daily commute? Look up gear for my newly level 80 warlock while I'm waiting to get my coffee?" Teresa says, "Yes! It's about time!" True, it doesn't have the real-time guild chat function that she was hoping for, but maybe someday... Walk towards the light, Tizzy. Walk towards the light!



Memories of Murder | DVD | $24.99

Roger happened upon Korean director Bong Joon-ho's 2003 film *Memories of Murder* while channel surfing one night. Based on the true story of South Korea's first known serial murders, which took place between 1986 and 1991 in Hwaseong, Gyeonggi Province, Roger was only going to watch a couple minutes of it. Two-and-a-half hours later, he sat stunned by the movie's initially infuriating ending. But after some consideration and reflection, he had to admit that it couldn't, and shouldn't, have ended any other way. Simply brilliant.

Brian Regan | Comedy | Samples are free

Besides orchestrating his life soundtrack, Carlos the Intern likes to laugh. Quietly...to himself. Which made his co-workers nervous when he used to work the midnight shift at the post office. But no worries, instead of being on the verge of going postal, Carlos was just listening to comedian Brian Regan on his iPod. He likes Brian because he sounds bewildered and frantic. Heh heh. That's reassuring… Anyway, Carlos says check out this Brian Regan bit at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1cYS6aGstU

Death Proof | Blu-ray | $29.95

While parts of this film made Teresa cringe, the ending made her jump up and scream, "Heck yeah! That's right!" (Which is so out of character for her that it makes us more nervous than Carlos' constant chuckling.) But Teresa says props to Tarantino for making the superficial conversations of flighty women actually interesting. *Death Proof* isn't a popcorn flick, but it will make you think about the psychos in the world. Oh yes, it does...

Chowder | Cartoon | Free while it lasts

An aficionado of all things funny, Carlos the Intern can often be found analyzing the comedic offerings on the Cartoon Network. He's currently enamored with *Chowder,* a show where the title character is a kid who's apprenticing to become a chef, but in this abstract fantasy world it's funny to see him even try and complete an order. "Um, isn't this show being cancelled, Carlos? Hey… Why'd you stop laughing?"

Et Cetera | PTOM section | Free! …er, with purchase

Scott loves our Et Cetera section: Plugging stuff we care about, sharing our passions with the readers—so much fun, and we're grateful for the opportunity. We just hope that you guys get something out of this once in a while, whether it's an iPhone application or a new favorite book (namely, Rob's). After all, this section isn't meant to be *totally* self-indulgent…ok, yes it is, but still! Thank you, Et Cetera, for allowing us to delude ourselves into believing the stuff we care about matters! [Still struggling with that writer's block, eh, Scott?]

Blu-ray Central

Why does it always have to be the videogame-based movie that sucks? *sigh*

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH

Blu-ray Disc
WATCHMEN
DIRECTOR'S CUT
WHO WILL SAVE US NOW?

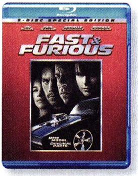
Watchmen: Director's Cut

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | It's not an exaggeration to call *Watchmen* one of the single best and most important big-budget movies of the decade. Moving far beyond its comic book base, this adaptation of one of the most important graphic novels ever created is simply amazing. Director Zach Snyder has remained true to the source material while modernizing and improving the original story's shortcomings. The ending is far better, and while some complained of the 152-minute length, the painstaking exposition of each character and the alternate 1980s is completely fascinating. The director's cut offers 25 more minutes of such exposition—making the film a full three hours—and is perfect for fans, but the exclusion of the theatrical cut is disappointing. Regardless, this is a great release of an amazing movie.

| EXTRAS | Though the second disc is full of a variety of background and making-of documentaries, video journals, and the various things you'd assume to be there, the real draw is the so-called maximum movie mode. Here, Zach Snyder steps in, shows side-by-side comparisons, offers insight into most aspects of the film, and a variety of other elements. It's just a more radical picture-in-picture feature, but an impressive use of Blu-ray technology. Overall though, it's probably not quite as informative as a great, straightforward commentary track and sadly, actual commentary will almost certainly have to wait until the next special edition.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½



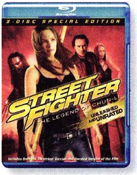
Fast & Furious

PRICE: $39.98 RATED: PG-13

| MOVIE | Big, dumb, and loud, this latest *Fast & Furious* is at least fun as well. Vin Diesel returns in a story with a distinct south of the border flavor that's full of one-liners, sexy cars, hot women, and testosterone-addled dudes. The plot is pure '80s-era action nonsense and the whole thing is completely forgettable, but for a mindless evening in, this is a great homemade popcorn muncher.

| EXTRAS | Director Justin Lin's commentary is remarkably slight and aimless. Thankfully, for fans of the series and the cars, there's a lot of equally throwaway material. Some of it is amusing though, and the included short film, *Los Bandoleros,* acts as a prologue to the main movie, which is a pretty cool addition.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½



Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: PG-13

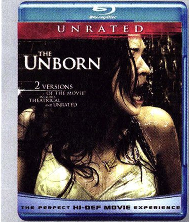
| MOVIE | It would be wrong to say that the latest attempt at a live action *Street Fighter* movie is worse than the first. Let's instead say that they are both equally awful, but in their own special ways. You could complain about the witless script, questionable acting, and a myriad of other lame aspects of the film, but really, how many kung fu movies have great scripts and acting? Why this Chun Li-centric movie ultimately fails is simply because it's boring. Fights are far too infrequent and, worse, badly done. Better luck next time, Capcom.

| EXTRAS | The commentary is actually quite engaging, offering a mix of actors and producers, though Kristin Kreuk is conspicuous by her absence. Beyond that, a surprising amount of extras is included. Plenty of making-of bits, history of the game, and related shorts crowd the main disc, but the inclusion of the animated origins anime will probably draw in hardcore fans.

MOVIE ★½
EXTRAS ★★★½

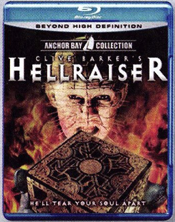
Halloween Bonanza Quick Picks

'Tis the Season, after all. (Well, the October issue, that you're reading in August, so you've no excuse for not being prepared).


UNRATED
THE UNBORN
2 VERSIONS OF THE MOVIE! INCLUDES THEATRICAL AND UNRATED
THE PERFECT HI-DEF MOVIE EXPERIENCE

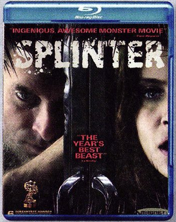
The Unborn

- Proof of two things: 1. Gary Oldman needs money. 2. David Goyer needs to be banned from directing. This *Exorcist* wannabe is a nonsensical retread for easily entertained teens.


BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION
ANCHOR BAY COLLECTION
CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER
HE'LL TEAR YOUR SOUL APART

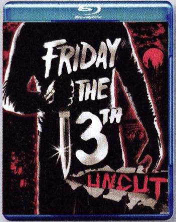
Clive Barker's Hellraiser

- Aside from not having aged well, the intriguing tale of hellish extra-dimensional beings is bogged down by awful acting, terrible dialogue, inept pacing, and all the close-up-riddled drama of your average daytime soap. Still, it's a classic!


"INGENIOUS AWESOME MONSTER MOVIE"
SPLINTER
"THE YEAR'S BEST BEAST"

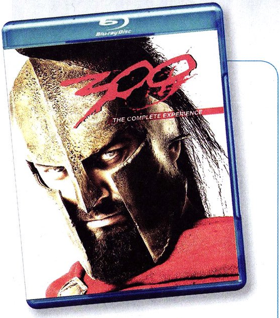
Splinter

+ Fun, smart, and with a great monster, this little movie is better than anything you've seen from a major studio. Sort of like *The Thing* in hot weather, *Splinter* might not be flawless but it's worth seeing.


FRIDAY THE 13TH
UNCUT

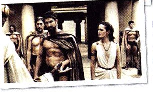
Friday the 13th

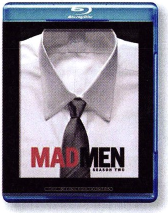
- Somehow Michael Bay and company managed to take an already inane series and make it...even more inane? Insipidly stupid characters, a completely illogical plot, boring and uninspired death sequences, and a Jason who looks and acts like a retarded woodsman?! There aren't enough fake breasts in the world to make this movie worth watching.


300
THE COMPLETE EXPERIENCE

300: The Complete Experience

Timed to cash in on Zach Snyder's *Watchmen,* Warner Bros. has re-released *300* on Blu-ray in a commendable fashion. The movie itself is the same, but the execution of the extras is sure to be a marker for things to come. The disc breaks the movie into 30-minute blocks and offers you the chance to switch between three distinct documentary trees on the fly. The first branch is about Frank Miller and translating the graphic novel work to film, the second about making the film, and the third about historical comparisons. It works well, except that the third branch—arguably the most interesting—is just too light on content. A better alternative would have been a steady commentary track from historians. As it is, though, WB has broken new ground in using the Blu-ray technology and we hope to see more like this in the future.




MAD MEN
SEASON TWO

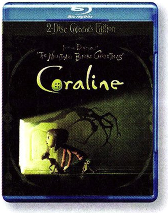
Mad Men: Season Two

PRICE: $49.99 **RATED:** NR

| MOVIE | The award-winning AMC show *Mad Men* walks a fine line between being fascinating and offensive, but does it with such skill that you can't help but be addicted. Too many of the characters, especially this season, seem a bit too unlikeable, but the setting, the outfits, the mannerisms, and the deft way the show mixes historical events into its plot all make for truly great television.

| EXTRAS | Cast and crew commentaries on all 13 episodes lead the way here, but there's an array of interesting material covering the era, sexism, the fashion, the music, and more. Overall, it's a great and complete package.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★


2-Disc Collector's Edition
"The Nightmare Before Christmas"
Coraline

Coraline

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | Kids need scary stuff too, and who better than Henry Selick to provide it. Adapted from Neil Gaiman's novel and filmed entirely with stop-motion animation, *Coraline* is a beautiful, engaging take on *Alice in Wonderland* that older kids are sure to adore. The 3D is surprisingly good as well—far smoother than most recent attempts we've seen—and while the movie is unlikely to hit the cult status of *Nightmare Before Christmas,* it's a wonderfully made twist on your average kid's yarn.

| EXTRAS | The several making-of shorts give plenty of insight into how much effort went into the film, and there's even a BD-Live exclusive featurette. The director's commentary is exemplary—Selick never stops talking about how the film was made, what and why things were changed from Gaiman's work, and just generally provides a great insight into his opus.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★

Jason D'Aprile finds that red/green 3D glasses give the color blind headaches. Questions? Problems? Advice? E-mail him! **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

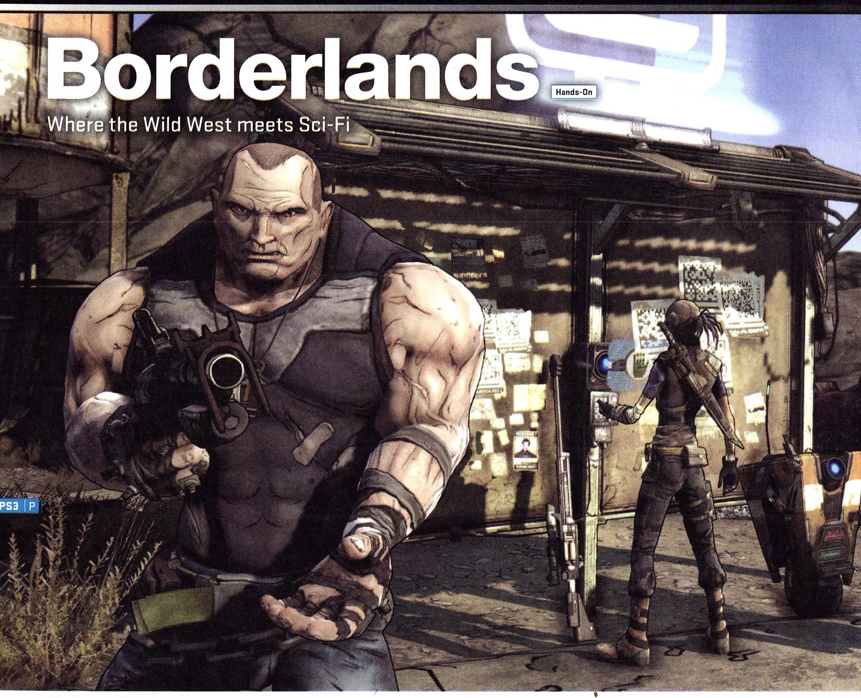
Previews

First Look | Hands-On | In-Depth

Borderlands

Hands-On

Where the Wild West meets Sci-Fi



▲ Don't worry, this giant beast of a man is on your side! He and the katana-packing badass in the background represent half of your interstellar treasure hunting team. Play solo as any one of the four, or recruit your friends for co-op and take the whole team!

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Roleplaying Shooter PUBLISHER: 2K DEVELOPER: Gearbox Software

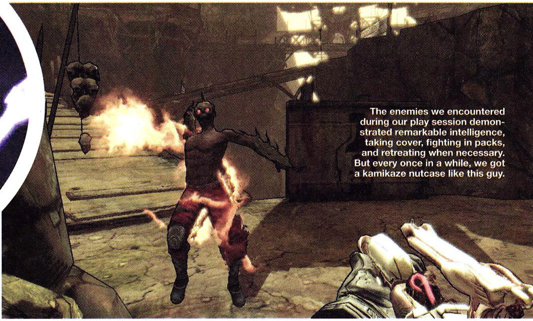
It's generally a bad idea to express strong opinions in a preview. After all, the game that's eventually released could end up being dramatically different from the game we actually saw…for better or worse. But get a load of this: *Borderlands* is going to absolutely knock you on your ass. It certainly blindsided us. With the abundance of high profile sequels scheduled to drop this holiday season, a new, relatively undersold IP was easy to overlook, but our extensive hands-on time during a recent visit to the Gearbox offices gave us a real appreciation for this game's immense potential.

What is a Roleplaying Shooter?

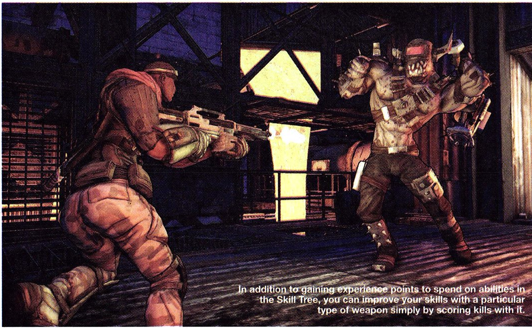
At first glance, you might assume that *Borderlands* is a first-person shooter, but you'd only be half right. It certainly *plays* like an FPS: With gun in hand, you'll traverse the harsh desert landscape of a lawless planet known as Pandora in search of a mythical cache of advanced alien technology, pumping rounds into the native fauna—a vicious and diverse group of creatures called skags—and any locals who look at you the wrong way…specifically, down the barrel of a gun.

But beneath this veil of real-time action, *Borderlands* is very much a roleplaying game. Case in point,

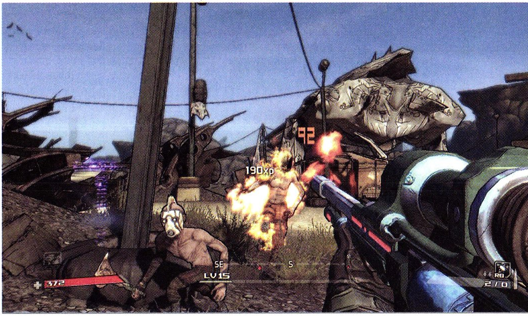
▲ *Borderlands* isn't particularly gory, but it also doesn't shy away from graphic violence. There's definitely a chance you'll see a face or two melted off.



The enemies we encountered during our play session demonstrated remarkable intelligence, taking cover, fighting in packs, and retreating when necessary. But every once in a while, we got a kamikaze nutcase like this guy.



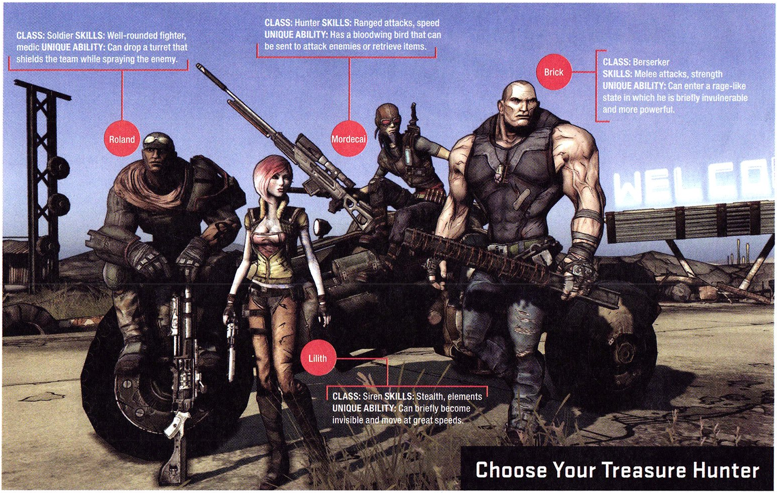
In addition to gaining experience points to spend on abilities in the Skill Tree, you can improve your skills with a particular type of weapon simply by scoring kills with it.



Even though *Borderlands* plays like a shooter, the heads-up display betrays its RPG roots: the orange 92 represents the amount of damage inflicted by your last shot and the "190xp" denotes the amount of experience you earned. Plus, you can see that your enemy is Level 15.

the opening screen actually asks you to choose your class—or really, your character, since each playable protagonist (Roland, Lilith, Mordecai, or Brick) possesses a unique skill set (see "Choose Your Treasure Hunter" on page 26). So your class determines not only your appearance, but also your available upgrades as you gain experience and level up. All of which sounds like the heart of an RPG.

Naturally, leveling up will make you more powerful—in addition to ➔



Roland
CLASS: Soldier **SKILLS:** Well-rounded fighter, medic **UNIQUE ABILITY:** Can drop a turret that shields the team while spraying the enemy.

Mordecai
CLASS: Hunter **SKILLS:** Ranged attacks, speed **UNIQUE ABILITY:** Has a bloodwing bird that can be sent to attack enemies or retrieve items.

Brick
CLASS: Berserker **SKILLS:** Melee attacks, strength **UNIQUE ABILITY:** Can enter a rage-like state in which he is briefly invulnerable and more powerful.

Lilith
CLASS: Siren **SKILLS:** Stealth, elements **UNIQUE ABILITY:** Can briefly become invisible and move at great speeds.

Choose Your Treasure Hunter

granting you access to weapons with higher level requirements and giving you a fighting chance against high level enemies—but you won't have to deal with the tedium of assigning points to individual attributes like speed, health, or reload time. You will, however, be able to use your XP to customize your character (and your play experience) in the straightforward Skill Tree.

> Every weapon you acquire is practically guaranteed to be one-of-a-kind, making every find feel like a mini-Christmas present...a lethal, semi-automatic Christmas present.

The very first point you spend unlocks your character's unique special ability, but subsequent points can be spent in any of three categories, each of which contains seven potential upgrades and caters to a different play style. You're free to mix and match upgrades, but you must invest in a category to make all seven upgrades available and you will never have a enough points to max out every upgrade—meaning you've got to pick a specialty or get creative.

For example, Gearbox threw a handful of upgrade points at us and told us to go to town, so we upgraded Mordecai's aiming stability and Critical Hit effectiveness despite the fact they occupied different categories (Sniper and Gunslinger respectively). So not only could we land headshots more easily, each shot was even more likely to result in a glorious cranial explosion. It was a good day to be a sniper. While a dev assist made this specific instance possible, similar scenarios will occur in the game.

The Skill Tree's not the only way to modify your character, though. As with most RPGs, items play a pivotal roll in *Borderlands,* and you may come across "class mod" items (unique, class-specific upgrades) and "artifacts" (general power-ups that endow new abilities, like an electrical charge that enhances all of your attacks) as you blast your way through Pandora. But you can also collect more standard loot like cash, energy shields, and, most importantly, guns.

Guns. Lots of guns.

In keeping with the typically inexhaustible supply of equipment in the average RPG, *Borderlands* offers an overwhelming 500,000 unique guns. That's right, half a million—at least. See, the system assembles weapons essentially at random, drawing from an extensive pool of gun components: stocks, grips, barrels, attachments, ammunition, clip size, and more. Considering the number of disparate parts, the possible permutations number in the millions (though, of course, some of those would be so unwieldy and impractical that Gearbox had to eliminate them).

Whether you're looting a fallen enemy or simply raiding a stray munitions crate, every weapon you acquire is practically guaranteed to be one-of-a-kind, making every find feel like a mini-Christmas present...a lethal, semi-automatic Christmas present. We can't even tell you how excited we were when we found an incendiary sniper rifle with a rotating six-shooter chamber or when we realized our pump-action shotgun actually fired rockets. And since

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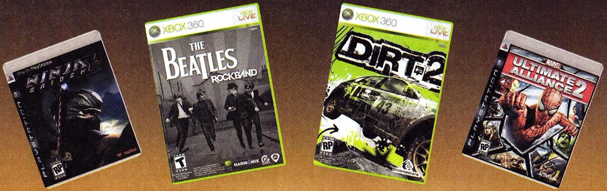
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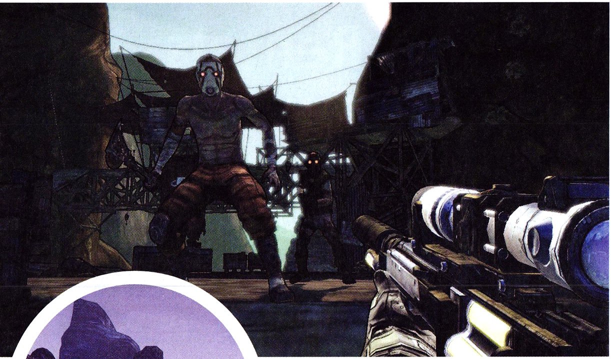
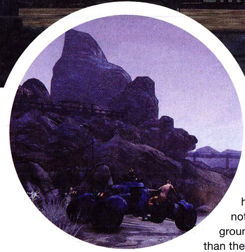


◄ **Each weapon comes with a unique description. The best one we saw: "Holy s#%&, it shoots rockets!"**



weapons do indeed have levels—just like you and your enemies—you'll constantly be in search of your next pride and joy.

Fortunately, you'll never have to wonder whether or not that mystery gun on the ground is actually more powerful than the one in your hands. Simply place your reticule over any weapon littering the wild to view a simple menu that provides an instant stat comparison and cursory description. Of course, you can often discern the quality of a gun just by looking at it: rust could be considered a bad sign, but other colors—like blue and yellow—typically indicate that the particular weapon is charged with some kind of elemental ammunition like electricity and acid.

Since this is an RPG and all, you can't get away with stockpiling every little weapon you find. Sadly, you'll be forced to contend with that ugly beast known as item management. Even though your sci-fi backpack scans all your items and stores their molecular data rather than the physical objects themselves, you can still run out of space (though you can purchase another "storage deck" for more memory or sell your excess items to local traders).

Friendly Fire

Despite all of these RPG trappings, *Borderlands'* story definitely deviates from the genre…but only slightly. You won't find any dialogue trees or epic cutscenes here, as nearly all the storytelling occurs in game. However, the overall structure more closely resembles *Fallout 3* than, say, *Call of Duty:* you roam through the world's various regions, speaking with NPCs to gather information and acquire missions, and nearly everyone you meet has a backstory. Whether you choose to explore these subplots or not is up to you, but the non-linear, story-driven approach definitely roots the game firmly in RPG territory.

But don't worry, shooter fans, Gearbox has thought of you too. Unlike *Fallout 3*, you can tackle the entire story cooperatively with up to three friends. (We'll pause while you celebrate…ok, moving on.) Anyone can choose any character, so you won't need to worry about fighting over favorites, and all experience, health, and pickups are automatically shared among all party members, though the person who actually picks up the item and fires the killing shot will benefit slightly more. You can even share items back and forth and rescue your fallen teammates before they bleed out. Assuming, that is, that they are unable to save themselves by eliminating an enemy as their screens gradually fade to black.

Of course, if you still manage to hate each other despite these incredibly reasonable teamwork tools, you can simply melee your teammate to challenge him to a duel. Should he decide to melee you back, an opaque dome will descend around you, trapping you in a confined space until one of you manages to off the other, at which point, everything will return to the pre-duel state.

And should you need to vent even more aggression (or if you'd like to level the playing field by setting both players to the same experience levels), you can travel to any area's Arena, where you can select weapons from a glorious wall of guns and engage in some *Quake*-style deathmatches.

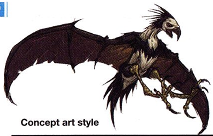
We were fortunate enough to play all this and more, and that, of course, is why we're particularly excited about this game. The shooter portion is fun and fast-paced with tight controls and an enjoyable mix of surprisingly smart enemies; the RPG elements are not only comprehensible but genuinely exciting, even to jaded shooter fans like us; and the guns…well, we would play this game *just* for the guns. Not everything about *Borderlands* completely impressed us—the lack of voice acting, for instance, was something of a bummer since no one likes being forced to read long passages of menu text—but we can quite easily envision this game becoming a sleeper hit like last year's *Dead Space.*

Scott Butterworth

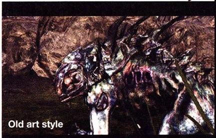
PS3 | **P**

The Ultimate Makeover

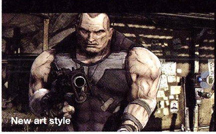
Borderlands is a very pretty game. Its cel-shaded textures and thick, dark outlines accentuate the vibrant colors and give the game a comic book-esque feel that not only looks unique but truly pops off the screen. But it didn't always look this way. In fact, the developers just recently abandoned the original gritty, realistic look…after nearly *three years* of development. It was a daring move, but they felt that they could more closely emulate the style of their concept art and that the game as a whole would be better for it. We think they made the right call. Check out the difference for yourself!



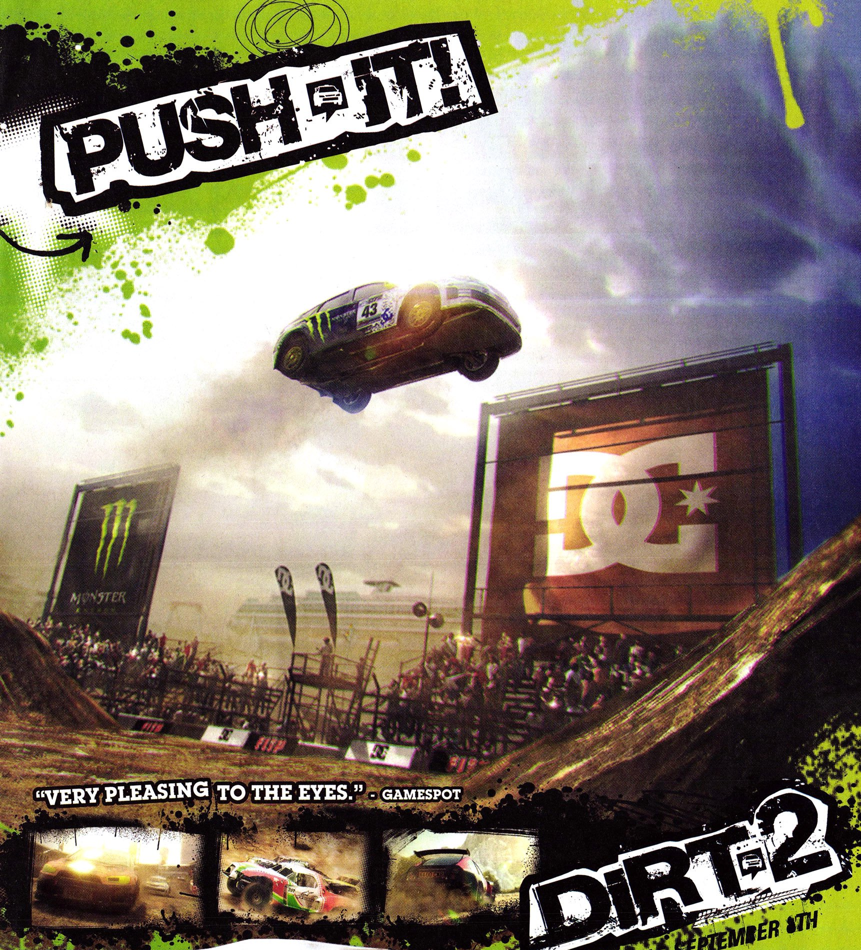
Concept art style



Old art style



New art style



PlayStation. PlayStation Network XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE

Wii. NINTENDO DS.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Suggestive Themes
Lyrics

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DIRT 2

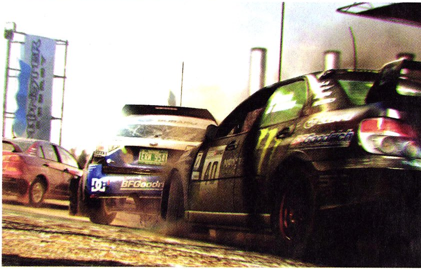
Hands-On

Roads are for sissies

PS3 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Driving
PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Codemasters Studios

Shut up and drive! Generally, that's a solid mantra in the racing world. But in the world of Rally racing with its unpredictable and frequently view-obstructed terrain, not listening to your co-pilot/navigator is a sure way to drive off into a ditch, slam into a tree, or go flying off a cliff. As if trying to find every last bit of traction that dirt, gravel, and rock has to offer weren't enough of a challenge!

And it's that elevated level of challenge that's immediately evident when the much anticipated preview build of *Dirt 2* finally arrived at PTOM Towers and we popped it into the PS3. Coming on the heels of last year's impressive *GRID* (which in turn came on the heels of 2007's excellent *Colin McRae: Dirt* for PS2), Codemasters Studios main challenge is maintaining the high standards of its pedigree. Although the devs prefaced (even stating it on the load screen) that the build is a work in progress, the visuals already look on par with *GRID*'s stylish presentation.



Car damage is impressively detailed, but it's up to you to dictate whether it affects vehicle performance or is merely cosmetic.

SUBARU
RECARO
EXEDY
MOTUL
PIAA

U.S.-spec Evo X: $33,710, *Dirt 2:* $59.99. *Bargain!*

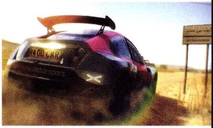
Beyond the obvious off-road vs. pavement difference, *Dirt 2's* play experience and overall structure is similar to *GRID's* with multi-tiered, vehicle class-comprised events situated in picturesque international locales. But a customizable RV serves as *Dirt's* new menu system and your home between races. It's an "atmospheric" touch that wasn't fully actualized in our build, but venturing in and out of the RV to set up every race seems a potentially tedious affair. We hope it's not a cute idea that merely keeps you further from the driving action.

Setting up a race centers on selecting an event based around one of the seven vehicle classes (see Kick Cl-ass sidebar) and then choosing the particular car, truck, or buggy you want to pilot. Three simple settings allow you to set the level of realism to suit your tastes. Difficulty options range from Easy to Casual to Serious to Savage to Extreme to Hardcore which influences factors like vehicle performance parameters and driver AI. But the main difference is the number of Flashbacks—a 10-second mulligan introduced in *GRID* that allows you to rewind and erase your driving mishaps—which range from five on Easy to zero on Hardcore settings. Selecting harder Difficulty settings is rewarded with larger prize purses, but regardless of the level you select, you can always choose whether damage is functional or cosmetic and whether you want to utilize customizable or auto/default vehicle setup settings.

Our *Dirt 2* preview build was closer to a demo than a complete game with a mere six events available to race, but it did offer the opportunity to sample each of the seven vehicle classes with races in London, Baja, Croatia, Morocco, and Japan. The traditional time-based cross country Rally and Enduro events required adjustments to approach and execution depending on the power and configuration of your ride, but it was the aggressive tight-quarters Rallycross races we enjoyed the most. *GRID* required a hard-earned level of driving prowess to master, and the challenge is that much more pronounced in *Dirt 2* where you lose the predictable grip offered by tarmac and are as apt to spend as much time drifting sideways than you are driving in a straight line.

There is the danger that the inherent challenge of off-road racing might discourage and scare off driving game neophytes (although the range of adjustability should allow tuning down to newbie-levels, if so desired), but for those looking for the next great racing challenge: There's a reason why Rally racers are pegged as the best drivers in the world.

Roger Burchill

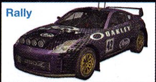


Released in 2007, the first game was titled *Colin McRae: Dirt.* The legendary Rally racer has since passed, but his legacy lives on in *Dirt 2* with the McRae R4.

Kick Cl-ass!

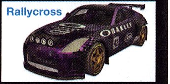
Dirt 2 features seven vehicle classes. While off-road newbies might be tempted to dismiss the nuances and differences between them, Rally fans know that each has a distinct feel and unique challenges.

Rally



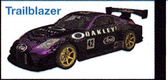
Versatility is key for open class Rally cars, as they must possess a balanced blend of acceleration, manoeuvrability, and handling. A typical Rally-class car is AWD with a turbocharged engine in the 340-hp range and attains speeds of over 115mph on tight, twisty gravel roads.

Rallycross



Rallycross cars sport derestricted engines that produce over 600-hp. With low ride heights and the fastest acceleration of all the vehicle classes, the cars are purpose-built for head-to-head racing on tight, short, mixed-surface courses, making for some of the most exciting races in the game.

Trailblazer



With no limitations on power, the 1,000-hp-plus Trailblazer cars require huge spoilers and diffusers just to keep them on the ground. But venturing cross-country over dirt trails and rough terrain at speeds in excess of 150mph seems more like suicide than racing.

Raid T1

Able to handle a wide-variety of terrain, Raid T1 vehicles are known for their endurance, strength, and speed. This jack-of-all-trades vehicle class is what you want to be driving when you venture out expecting to cope with the unexpected.

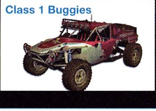
Stock Baja

A predominantly American class, Stock Baja vehicles are considered entry-level rides for budding off-road rookies. The vehicles are based on production SUVs and 4x4s, but they sport strong engines with huge power and bags of torque, and aren't to be trifled with.

Trophy Trucks

Another class raced predominately in the Americas, Trophy Trucks are the premium racing class in desert off-road racing and the stars of the Baja 1000. The V8-powered trucks produce over 700-hp and have state-of-the-art suspensions with over 30 inches of wheel travel.

Class 1 Buggies



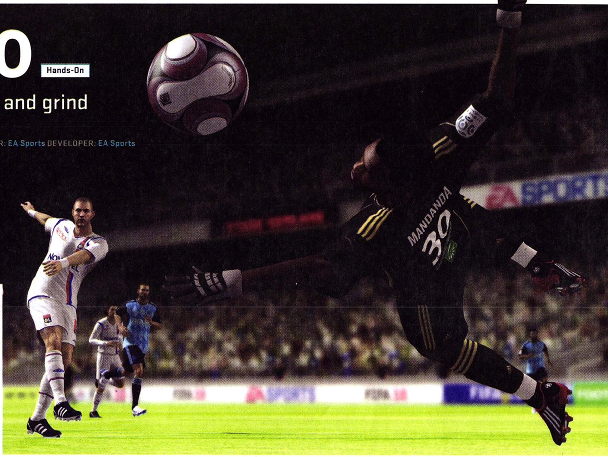
The biggest and fastest buggies in off-road racing, Class 1 Buggies are the only vehicles that can compete against the more powerful Trophy Trucks. The buggies' V8 engines "only" produce about 600-hp, but their performance is augmented by their lighter weight.

FIFA 10

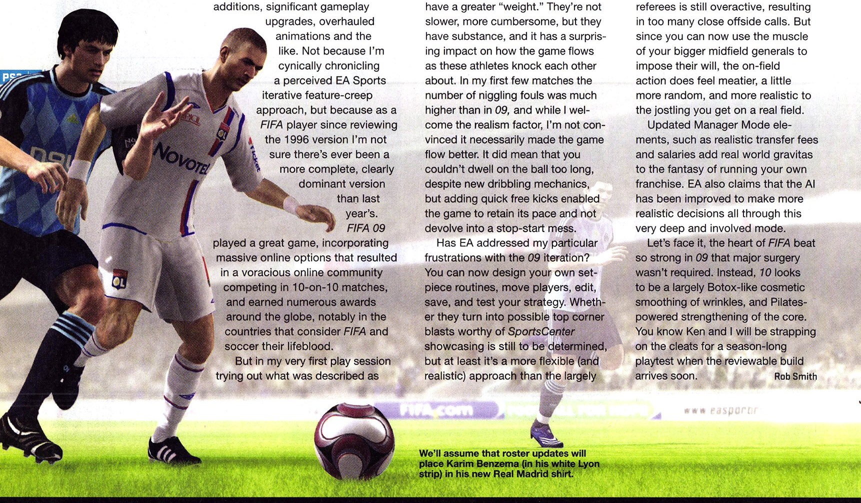
Hands-On

Now with added bump and grind

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports



▲ Time to make free-kicks worthwhile. If it works right you could spend a ton of time practicing these set pieces.



Really, I'm not expecting much from *FIFA 10.* By much, I mean grand feature additions, significant gameplay upgrades, overhauled animations and the like. Not because I'm cynically chronicling a perceived EA Sports iterative feature-creep approach, but because as a *FIFA* player since reviewing the 1996 version I'm not sure there's ever been a more complete, clearly dominant version than last year's. *FIFA 09* played a great game, incorporating massive online options that resulted in a voracious online community competing in 10-on-10 matches, and earned numerous awards around the globe, notably in the countries that consider *FIFA* and soccer their lifeblood.

But in my very first play session trying out what was described as a 70-percent complete version of *FIFA 10,* the changes were obvious and intriguing. Basically, players now have a greater "weight." They're not slower, more cumbersome, but they have substance, and it has a surprising impact on how the game flows as these athletes knock each other about. In my first few matches the number of niggling fouls was much higher than in *09,* and while I welcome the realism factor, I'm not convinced it necessarily made the game flow better. It did mean that you couldn't dwell on the ball too long, despite new dribbling mechanics, but adding quick free kicks enabled the game to retain its pace and not devolve into a stop-start mess.

Has EA addressed my particular frustrations with the *09* iteration? You can now design your own set-piece routines, move players, edit, save, and test your strategy. Whether they turn into possible top corner blasts worthy of *SportsCenter* showcasing is still to be determined, but at least it's a more flexible (and realistic) approach than the largely worthless hoofs over the bar in last year's version. It does seem like the hairline trigger-flag of the assistant referees is still overactive, resulting in too many close offside calls. But since you can now use the muscle of your bigger midfield generals to impose their will, the on-field action does feel meatier, a little more random, and more realistic to the jostling you get on a real field.

Updated Manager Mode elements, such as realistic transfer fees and salaries add real world gravitas to the fantasy of running your own franchise. EA also claims that the AI has been improved to make more realistic decisions all through this very deep and involved mode.

Let's face it, the heart of *FIFA* beat so strong in *09* that major surgery wasn't required. Instead, *10* looks to be a largely Botox-like cosmetic smoothing of wrinkles, and Pilates-powered strengthening of the core. You know Ken and I will be strapping on the cleats for a season-long playtest when the reviewable build arrives soon. **Rob Smith**

We'll assume that roster updates will place Karim Benzema (in his white Lyon strip) in his new Real Madrid shirt.

Carlsberg
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KONAMI KONAMI KONAMI

You recognize Thierry Henry, right? Well, soccer fans will, with the improved likenesses in this year's *PES.*

Pro Evolution Soccer 10

First Look

Pressure on. Gloves off.

PS3 AVAILABLE: November GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Konami

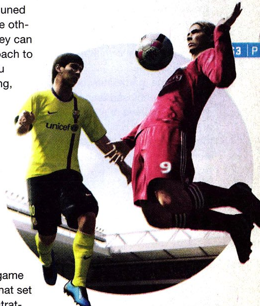
Waking a sleeping giant, as Emperor Hirohito discovered after backing off from the attack on Pearl Harbor, can be a sobering decision. Repercussions can and should be swift and decisive, and in the battle for soccer videogame supremacy, EA responded to the upstart threat from Konami's poorly-licensed but quality gameplay experience in *PES* by, in layman's terms, taking them to the cleaners in *FIFA 09.* So the underdog we embraced with such gusto has to take a stand with the 2010 version. Lines are drawn in the sand, and in the cutthroat sales environment of soccer sim-dom (which counts for a hell of a lot, if not on U.S. shores, in every other significant market around the world) this battle needs every combatant's best foot forward.

Curiously, bullet point number one for Konami this year is stadium and player likenesses. The intention is to make each location, each real-world player available in its licensed roster, and each situation available to its animators, as true to life as possible. We've yet to get our hands on and see for ourselves (and "gameplay" videos are so artfully edited that they barely resemble the cutscenes, let alone the on-field action visuals) that we have to reserve judgment. Visual quality hasn't been a standout of *PES's* history, with that focus going towards the on-field action. Last year, though, *FIFA* slowed down the pace while *PES* supersized the abilities of the star players. But those abilities unbalanced the rest of the action, making success a case of managing those stars, not playing tactical soccer. That effect has definitely been refined this year, creating slightly more parity between player abilities, though individualism will now be expressed through a card system.

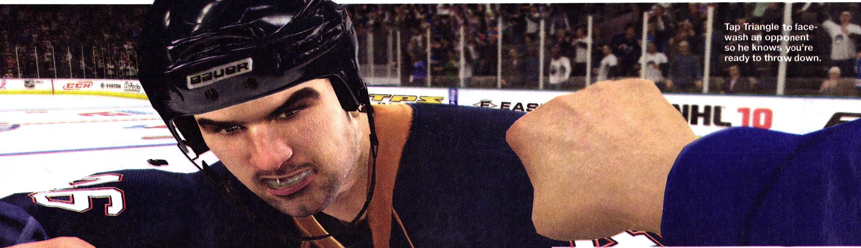
Each player has 12 ability card slots, but even the top stars, so we understand, will only be able to fill nine. These cards will have fixed in-game effects like Reaction, making that player more attuned to "reading" the game, while others can be toggled since they can impact your strategic approach to any given game. Should you want to play a roving, flowing, passing strategy against a team known to man-mark, then maybe you can add the Free Roaming ability for a top star and Incisive Run for a teammate in order to unlock a tight-defending team. Precision Passer might be handy, too, to give that through ball any chance of finding a teammate.

This ebb and flow of the game can be adjusted by sliders that set attacking styles, defensive strategy, and other tactical factors. It all seems to direct *PES* towards a more studious interpretation of the beautiful game, one that will make its pace more akin to *FIFA 09,* but could also disjoint existing *PES* die-hards. We hope to get hands-on soon, and see how this battle of sports titans plays out for 2010.

Rob Smith



▲ Star players like Fernando Torres (above) will have several special ability cards that separate them from "regular" schmoes.



Tap Triangle to face-wash an opponent so he knows you're ready to throw down.

NHL 10

Hands-On

Further improving an award winner

PS3 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

PS3 | P

Consistent high quality has been a hallmark of EA's *NHL* franchise and in last year's version it seemed to elevate the entire package, resulting in one of the most complete sports games we've seen. I have to admit, I've played tons more hockey in videogame form than I've actually watched on TV. The pace of the game (particularly post-strike), the enclosed arena, and the skill requirements of stick handling and puck passing all meld into ideal videogame form. If there were no real hockey, videogame makers would have invented it.

Building on the award-winning formula of last year, EA is touting its new boardplay as an integral on-ice improvement in *NHL 10.* It's hardly a game-changer, but it does result in some more realistic situations that you're likely to see in any game on TV. A teammate will now make himself available on the boards if you're trapped there, and player size actually impacts the strength tussle over who snags control of the puck.

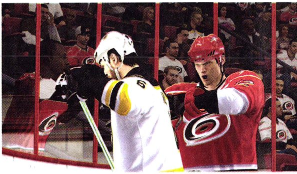
The players did feel to have more weight to their collisions this year, maybe sharing a theme (or code) with the *FIFA* developers, though I suspect it originated here first. Puck passing has been tuned to add a little more, well, it felt like randomness, but it's actually more like realism. You can pass into space…even though you might just be careless and were hoping the AI would understand you wanted to find a teammate, not a chunk of open ice. And the game keeps flowing, even if you're knocked to your knees you can still pass or shoot.

A slew of online additions (that we couldn't test out) have been added to the roster, including the return of the fantasy draft so you and your season-long buddies can argue and trade over all the star players in your own leagues. The GM mode now tracks your lifetime performance, handing out virtual gongs for your achievements along the way (assuming you achieve some modicum of success).

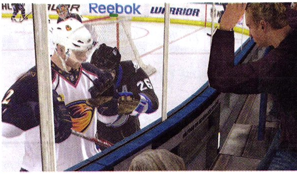
And I'll admit that this is just me, but the fighting is a big turn-off. It's often so fake (in its cause, not the actual throwing of punches), and though an integral part of the game to hardcore fans, I just don't get it. So I won't be invoking the new first-person fighting system too often, even though if you time it right (and pick on someone you can beat) it can reenergize your lines.

Of course, the super-slick presentation is in place, and it seems a shame to understate a visual style that is so strong, but it's like we've become complacent by the excellence, and it's only when someone not so familiar sees the game on a TV and they ask why you're suddenly watching a hockey match that you realize it really is that good.

Rob Smith



Now you'll get a little help from a friend as you pin the puck and opponent to the boards.



These battles on the boards also bring the crowd more into focus, and the animations and range of emotions coming from the stands has become more dynamic.

RANGERS
TPS

Signature moves like the cover star's goal celebration have been recreated using a new motion-capture technique said to be four times more accurate than the one used in *2K09.*

NHL 2K10

Hands-On

In case Ovechkin's $124 million contract wasn't enough...

PS3 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: 2K Sports DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts

The evolution of 2K Sports' franchises continues as its NHL game moves to star studio Visual Concepts, following the lead of *MLB 2K* also leaving its home at Kush Games. This pattern was designed to up the overall quality level; it worked for *MLB* and we're seeing the same kind of thought and core gameplay progression in *NHL 2K10.* Its broadcast-style presentation is excellent, featuring commentary and play-by-play work from best-in-the-biz Randy Hahn and Drew Remenda, and its cover star is the NHL's biggest, Russian Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals.

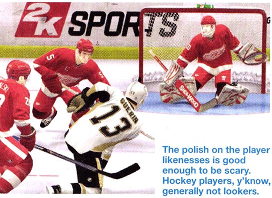
That star power isn't just a name or toothless face to fill a game box; it's also a statement of style. Ovechkin's panache and personality, vigor and enthusiasm, also appear to be seared into the on-ice gameplay. *NHL 2K10* is a get-in-and-go experience, with the developers explaining that they've done away with the wall between online and offline options. You boot up, choose a game, and go. Menus are minimal and you can be playing a buddy, random online player, or AI in seconds.

On the ice, picture-in-picture insets show the penalty box and subs to keep you informed of line changes and more. The camera angle has been shifted slightly higher from *NHL 2K09,* so it's easier to see the full scheme of offensive and defensive shifts. It also helps that the skating model has undergone tweaks to make it easier to control skating backwards, which gives you a feeling of greater control over your defensemen than in previous iterations. You'll see plenty of other broadcast-style upgrades, such as replays highlighting signature moves like Ovechkin's goal celebration.

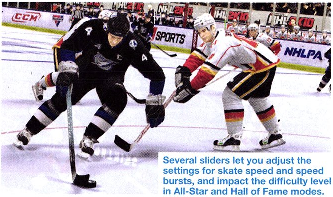
Each match should also flow smoother due to an improved animation system that includes "stumble shots" that allows your player to get off a shot if you're checked in the process of shooting. Even as you fall, you can still flick that shot on goal, and that process ensures fluid motion and keeps that puck moving.

To make it your own, *NHL 2K10* also lets you create a new team, customize your logo, set your roster and invite friends along to compete in six-on-six online matches against other player-created franchises. So you get the sense that Visual Concepts' fresh approach has galvanized the pieces of a solid but flawed franchise in a way that should provide a fresh, Ovechkin-powered option for both hockey fans and fast-paced sports gamers when it ships later this year.

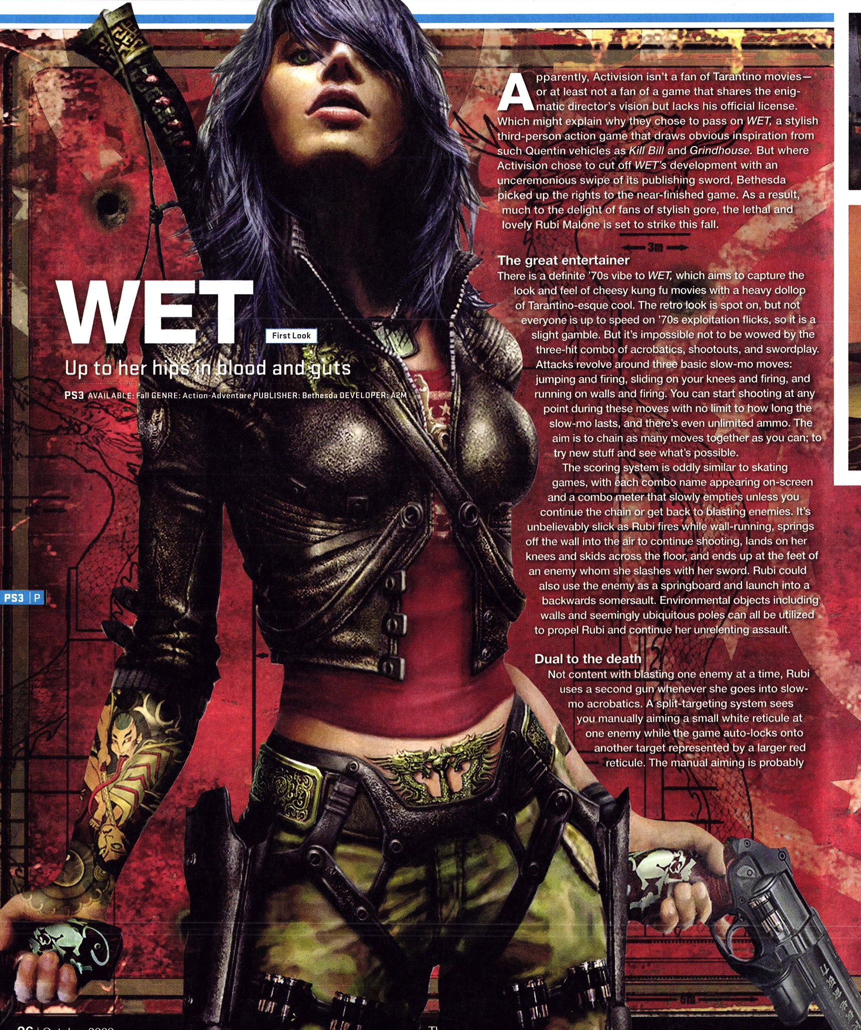
Rob Smith



The polish on the player likenesses is good enough to be scary. Hockey players, y'know, generally not lookers.



Several sliders let you adjust the settings for skate speed and speed bursts, and impact the difficulty level in All-Star and Hall of Fame modes.



WET

First Look

Up to her hips in blood and guts

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Action-Adventure PUBLISHER: Bethesda DEVELOPER: A2M

Apparently, Activision isn't a fan of Tarantino movies—or at least not a fan of a game that shares the enigmatic director's vision but lacks his official license. Which might explain why they chose to pass on *WET*, a stylish third-person action game that draws obvious inspiration from such Quentin vehicles as *Kill Bill* and *Grindhouse*. But where Activision chose to cut off *WET's* development with an unceremonious swipe of its publishing sword, Bethesda picked up the rights to the near-finished game. As a result, much to the delight of fans of stylish gore, the lethal and lovely Rubi Malone is set to strike this fall.

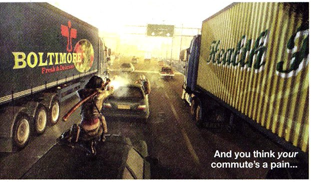
The great entertainer

There is a definite '70s vibe to *WET*, which aims to capture the look and feel of cheesy kung fu movies with a heavy dollop of Tarantino-esque cool. The retro look is spot on, but not everyone is up to speed on '70s exploitation flicks, so it is a slight gamble. But it's impossible not to be wowed by the three-hit combo of acrobatics, shootouts, and swordplay. Attacks revolve around three basic slow-mo moves: jumping and firing, sliding on your knees and firing, and running on walls and firing. You can start shooting at any point during these moves with no limit to how long the slow-mo lasts, and there's even unlimited ammo. The aim is to chain as many moves together as you can; to try new stuff and see what's possible.

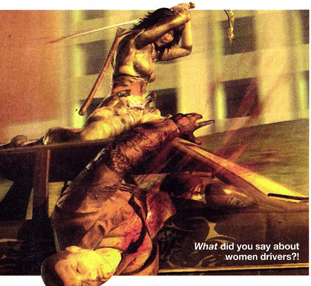
The scoring system is oddly similar to skating games, with each combo name appearing on-screen and a combo meter that slowly empties unless you continue the chain or get back to blasting enemies. It's unbelievably slick as Rubi fires while wall-running, springs off the wall into the air to continue shooting, lands on her knees and skids across the floor, and ends up at the feet of an enemy whom she slashes with her sword. Rubi could also use the enemy as a springboard and launch into a backwards somersault. Environmental objects including walls and seemingly ubiquitous poles can all be utilized to propel Rubi and continue her unrelenting assault.

Dual to the death

Not content with blasting one enemy at a time, Rubi uses a second gun whenever she goes into slow-mo acrobatics. A split-targeting system sees you manually aiming a small white reticule at one enemy while the game auto-locks onto another target represented by a larger red reticule. The manual aiming is probably



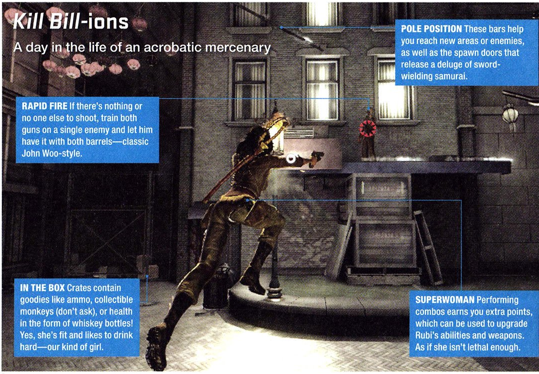
And you think *your* commute's a pain...



What did you say about women drivers?!

Kill Bill-ions

A day in the life of an acrobatic mercenary



POLE POSITION These bars help you reach new areas or enemies, as well as the spawn doors that release a deluge of sword-wielding samurai.

RAPID FIRE If there's nothing or no one else to shoot, train both guns on a single enemy and let him have it with both barrels—classic John Woo-style.

IN THE BOX Crates contain goodies like ammo, collectible monkeys (don't ask), or health in the form of whiskey bottles! Yes, she's fit and likes to drink hard—our kind of girl.

SUPERWOMAN Performing combos earns you extra points, which can be used to upgrade Rubi's abilities and weapons. As if she isn't lethal enough.

more challenging than pulling off all the acrobatics, especially when you upgrade to limited-ammo weapons such as dual shotguns and dual sub-machineguns. Later levels up the challenge with enemies adorned in body armor that's fairly resistant to bullets, thus negating (or balancing) her deadly abilities.

Every so often, Rubi enters larger, more open "Combat Areas" containing three spawn doors. These areas keep filling with enemies—a bit like the Smith-clones fight scene in *The Matrix Reloaded*—until the doors are destroyed. The trick is locating the doors and working out how best to reach them since most are located on platforms above you. It's a nice change of pace, but you won't be able to resist the temptation to let as many enemies as possible spawn just to take them all on at once.

Actually, *WET's* Rage mode specifically caters to that one-woman army mentality. The Rage sequences are like intermissions (replacing loading screens rather than being activated) where a red filter is triggered and Rubi transforms into a near-invincible killing machine with greater speed and faster health regeneration. It's reminiscent of the silhouetted House of Blue Leaves showdown in *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, but with the game's enemies stylishly disintegrating into pieces as they're slain.

Exotic gameplay

Other signature moments include the "Exotic Gameplay" sections, which is a fancy way of describing on-rail shooter sequences mixed in with button-pressing Quick-Time Events. It's hard not to be swept along by the spectacle of Rubi throwing herself from vehicle to vehicle across four lanes of traffic. Button prompts alert you to abandon a vehicle before it's rammed off the road or explodes, and there are some close shaves worthy of the best Hollywood movie car chases. If the sight of Rubi leaping from a truck to a car roof before taking her sword to an enemy doesn't get you going, you're dead inside.

There are strong similarities to both *Stranglehold* and *Afro Samurai,* yet *WET* already feels more substantial and slicker than both. The acrobatics and the ability to chain together moves with either guns or your sword are fantastic, and if the split-targeting lock-on is tightened up, then the combat could be pretty flawless. Which could mean that Activision has good reason to second-guess their decision—or at least to keep looking over their shoulder in case Rubi decides to deliver a little payback.

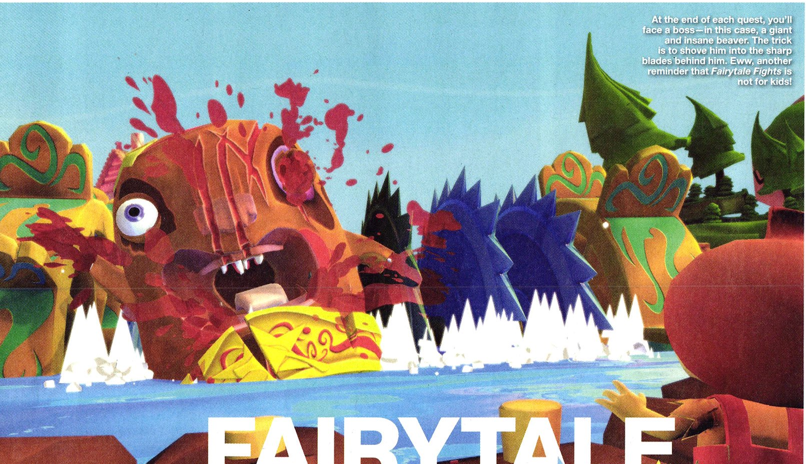
Jonathan Todd

Rubi Malone: Gun and sword for hire.

Now, it's personal...

Rubi's reasons for slaughtering all-comers

Although there have been numerous gameplay tweaks during *WET's* development, the storyline hasn't changed. Rubi Malone is a mercenary who agrees to help a wealthy man find and bring back his unruly son. However, it's all a setup and the man who hired her isn't who he appears to be, forcing Rubi to go on the run and embark on a globetrotting adventure to track him down. Cue loads of double-crosses and violent paybacks—*WET's* title actually stems from "wetworks," CIA jargon for missions that become messy and bloody. And there you were thinking it had something to do with the fact the lead character is a well-endowed young woman and that sex and sexual innuendos sell videogames. Tsk. Shame on you.



At the end of each quest, you'll face a boss—in this case, a giant and insane beaver. The trick is to shove him into the sharp blades behind him. Eww, another reminder that *Fairytale Fights* is not for kids!

FAIRYTALE Fights

Hands-On

So wrong.

PS3 | P

Whacked out fairytales are feuding

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Platformer PUBLISHER: Playlogic DEVELOPER: Playlogic Games Factory

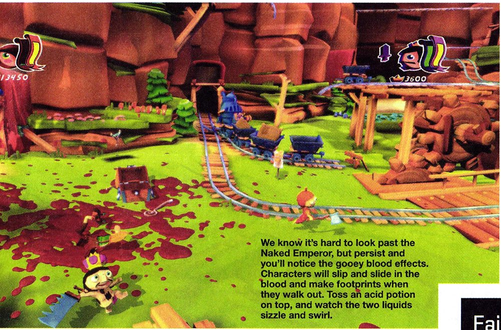
▼ Methinks the happy lumberjack giant drank too many kegs of Bourbon-spiced apple cider!

If you ever thought Little Red Riding Hood deserved a spanking for the trouble she caused the poor Big Bad Wolf, you'll like *Fairytale Fights*—this hack-'n'-slash platformer lets you give her one. Imagine your favorite fairytale characters dripping with blood, being sliced (or slicing others) into pieces, and grinning maniacally as they wield inappropriate weapons like machetes and shotguns while tromping through bright, Disney-fied stages. I can only come to one conclusion: somebody at Playlogic had an angry childhood.

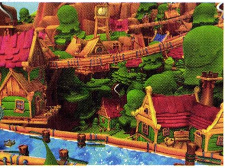
Grimm settings

Here's the deal: People don't care about fairytales anymore. You may shrug, but former fairytale celebrities like Snow White and the Naked Emperor (of *The Emperor's New Clothes)* aren't smiling. They're seething. And they're determined to regain their prestige, even if it means grabbing axes and slashing up former friends (whose behavior may be the reason for their lost rep).

Up to four players (online or off) can jump into the story campaign at any time, and the levels I tested in my exclusive hands-on demo showcased a host of fanciful settings. In the Wood Capital stage, I walked Little Red Riding Hood across a cheery town of log cabins, quaint wooden bridges, and... blood-frenzied lumberjacks out for blood? I couldn't let them kill Red, so I punched open the closest chest and picked up the first weapon that popped out: a ship's anchor. I frantically swung it at the lumberjacks, decapitating one. As the corpse squirted a fountain of blood up to the sky, the game gave a close-up replay on one side of the screen, highlighting the engine's dynamic slicing technology. A few chop-chops later, and the other two 'jacks were dead as well. I platformed past



We know it's hard to look past the Naked Emperor, but persist and you'll notice the gooey blood effects. Characters will slip and slide in the blood and make footprints when they walk out. Toss an acid potion on top, and watch the two liquids sizzle and swirl.



▲ Looks are deceiving. This happy environment is actually fraught with dangers. Look closely and you'll see blades that can slice you to pieces.

rotating blades and smiling giants to get to the end of the demo. (I also noticed some areas were only accessible with two or more players, like in *LittleBigPlanet).*

The other stages I tried were equally creative, like the candy palace inspired by Hansel and Gretel populated with enemy gingerbread men, sugary platforms, and chubby kids. I also entered a giant's house (the one from *Jack and the Beanstalk),* though the little gnomes who resided there didn't seem to like my intrusion. I wonder if the mousetraps littering the ceiling pathways I took were set by them or by the giant in order to capture them. At times, I could see the giant lumber past underneath.

Flickity flick

Considering the mature theme, the controls are surprisingly accessible. The Left-analog stick controls movements, the Right-analog stick controls your "hands" (really, your weapons), X lets you jump, and R1 equips or tosses weapons. To attack, you "flick" your Right-analog stick in the direction of enemies. It's, ah, a bit simplistic to say the least, but if you flick your stick at an enemy quickly enough, it'll build into a combo. You can also toss your weapon into an enemy, watch it sink into his chest and kill him, and then pull it back out to re-use. And with over a hundred (possibly over two hundred) weapons to wield—including wands, lollipops, and rifles—the combat ought to be visually entertaining if given sufficient polish.

Deaths are handled forgivingly. Anytime you die, you'll reappear in a tomb—marked by anything from a shiny sarcophagus to a plain stick, depending on how well you performed before you died—and you just tap a button to come back to life. Lives are infinite. You'll lose some gold and Prestige points, but you'll never see a Game Over.

Not for kids!

I've always thought Snow White deserved a beating for being such a goody two shoes—a fantasy I intend to realize in the Player-vs.-Player arena—and as a fan of fairytales, I'm interested in this unusual direction. But I worry that the gameplay might lack depth. So I'm bartering with my fairy godmother (a lifetime supply of cigarettes in exchange for her magical aid) that the final game experience will live up to its premise.

Teresa Dun

Dream Fights

Four playable characters seems a bit few, which means DLC is almost definitely in the works. Here's a list of characters PTOM would like to see in the game.

Rumpelstiltskin: A short little dude with a loom and a first-born baby strapped to his back.

Evil Stepsisters from Cinderella: Siamese twins. We want to see these two cruel ladies share one body but have two heads that can't stop bickering.

The Frog King: A humanoid frog with a lopsided crown, tiny arms and legs, and big, smoochable lips. He has to make kissy noises.

Rapunzel: A damsel with long, braided locks that she can use as a whip to rip enemies to shreds.

The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs: A cigar chompin', fowl-mouthed avian who expels high-velocity fragmentation eggs.

Fairytale Heroes

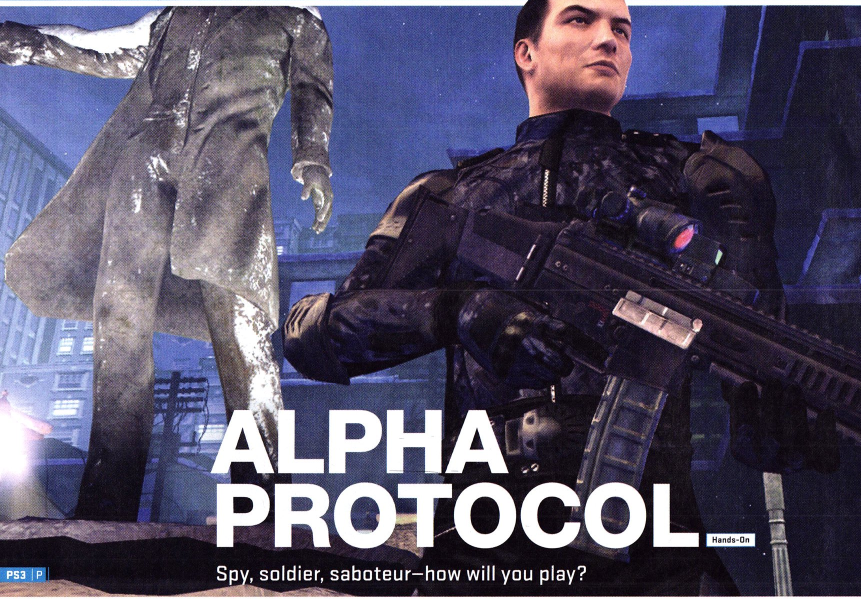
You'll be able to pick one of four characters to control in *Fairytale Fights.* Your friends can hop into your game anytime using one of these characters as well. Hmm, the thought of the Naked Emperor whacking his sword at the Little Red Riding Hood kind of makes me cringe…

Little Red Riding Hood

Snow White

The Naked Emperor, from *The Emperor's New Clothes*

Jack from *Jack and the Beanstalk*



ALPHA PROTOCOL

Hands-On

PS3 | P

Spy, soldier, saboteur—how will you play?

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Action RPG **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** Obsidian Entertainment

I finally exhale, peering across the beige and brown wind-swept Saudi Arabian canyon. After three levels, I've caught the convoy carrying the stolen Halbech missiles and have threaded four bullets into the security gate gears, forcing it closed and halting the convoy. The terrorist Sheikh Ali Shaheed, who I've tracked since the beginning of this, the game's first chapter, is in one of those trucks. The music gains tempo, bullets whiz past my head, and suddenly I'm in the first major boss fight in *Alpha Protocol.*

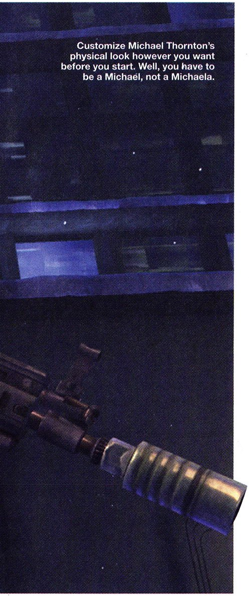
▼ Ah, this must be the virtual voyeur skill specialization.

Developer Obsidian Entertainment's modern spy thriller does justice to the one thing that always seems to fall short in 99-percent of videogames: storytelling. Obsidian's work on a multi-layered narrative mapped to a branching dialogue tree provides you with moral choices that affect the story and your character's progression from beginning to end.

Storytelling done right

The battle with Shaheed introduces the gameplay mechanics and style, and sets the tone for the game. After destroying his vehicle, you confront him in an interactive cutscene. What he has to say is startling because it opens up the game to a world far more complex than when *The Matrix's* Neo chose between a red and a blue pill. The camera comes up close to Shaheed's weather-beaten face and focused eyes glaring from behind cracked glasses. His thick voice crackles with anger. "Those missiles you seek weren't stolen. They were given to me by Halbech [a mysterious "ethically agnostic" weapons contractor]—with the support of the U.S. government. Now, you can either trust me or kill me."

Shaheed's words open up a real-time story-tree on screen with the options "Arrest," "Curious," "Professional," and "Execute," each mapped to a face button, and a horizontal bar



Customize Michael Thornton's physical look however you want before you start. Well, you have to be a Michael, not a Michaela.

counts down time. Up until now I've had a few conversations permitting me to gain (or lose) the trust of Mina Tang and Sean Darcy, two operatives back at Alpha Protocol (AP), but nothing like this. Now *I* have to decide whom rookie agent Michael Thornton will be: A loyal soldier who sees the world in black and white, or a thinking soldier who smells a conspiracy. What should I do?

Decisions, decisions

The Saudi Arabia mission is the first of five chapters that also involve extended stays in Rome, Moscow, Taipei, and Graybox, the AP headquarters (location unknown… ooh!). As Thornton explores Saudi Arabia, you explore how you'd like to play the game—as a rifle-wielding soldier, a stealthy field agent, a tech specialist, or a custom freelancer. As you progress in any of the character types, you'll earn experience points, advance in levels, and gain funds that allow you to develop Thornton how you choose.

By achieving primary and secondary mission objectives, you'll earn experience points manually attributable to diverse characteristics. Spies, for instance will want to upgrade stealth, pistols, and martial arts. Soldiers will seek to upgrade submachine guns, assault rifles, and toughness. Explosive experts will hone in on sabotage and technical aptitude upgrades. These are the most logical choices, but you can attribute skill points to any of the characteristics you want. So not only do you make choices in the story-tree affecting the narrative's direction, you customize the kind of agent you'll be.

Custom built

Deepening the choices one step further, Obsidian outfits Thornton with an array of weapons, gadgets, and armor mods. Once you've earned enough cash for a soldier, for instance, you can add corkscrew rifling to increase damage inflicted, or an extended clip to your dual Samuel PMG submachine guns. For technical experts, why not purchase night operations armor to mute clanking gear and footsteps? Obsidian also rewards Thornton with little bonus points called "Perks," like tacking on +5 endurance points by using a professional conversation approach, or adding +1 accuracy to that assault rifle by killing 25 enemies with headshots.

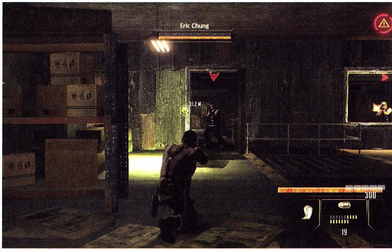
Obsidian's creative approach to RPG design goes even deeper. The game "recognizes" your character type and adjusts the kinds of challenges you'll face to it. If, for instance, you decide to be a stealth agent, an array of safes, locked doors, and items will appear that benefit spies. If you decide to play as a soldier, the actual physical levels remain the same, but you'll have a harder time (i.e. picking fewer locks), and different items appear, such as a surplus of cash specifically placed for you to upgrade your gun specialty.

Welcome to the machine

In my confrontation with Shaheed, I still have to make a choice: Kill him or spare him? I decide I want to know more; so I spare him. By taking this path, my trust points increase, I gain a trophy (for sparing him), and I learn that Halbech will soon be after me. Shaheed agrees to feed me information, provide funds, and to meet with me again.

He walks away, but as he does, three missiles appear out of nowhere and destroy Shaheed's convoy, including the "stolen" missile cache. Mina appears on my PDA telling me Alpha Protocol or Halbech might have sent them, she's not sure, and I've been wiped from AP's memory banks, essentially blacklisting me. There is now a bounty on my head. I am a rogue agent, and it's just chapter one. Welcome to *Alpha Protocol.*

Douglass C. Perry



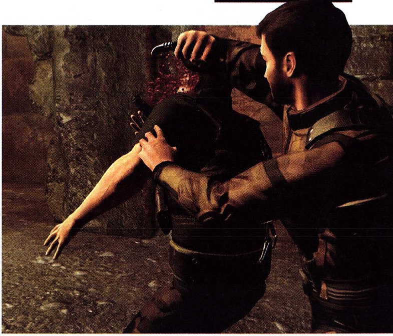
Your skill specializations will inform your decisions in each treacherous confrontation. Maybe you go for the shoot-out, or maybe a silent, stealthy takedown.

Pick your role, player

Obsidian offers four initial character choices at the outset of the game: Soldier, Field Agent, Tech Specialist, and Freelancer. Each character type provides a skill chart with 31 points pre-selected to certain characteristics to guide you into that specialty. The one exception is the freelancer, who is given 31 un-attributed points. I played through twice, once as a field agent, the second time through as a tech specialist. Here's what their skill branch point distribution looks like in the beginning.

Field Agent: Stealth: 3; Pistols: 1; Martial Arts: 2.

Tech Specialist: Stealth: 1; Shotguns: 2; Sabotage: 3; Technical Aptitude: 2.



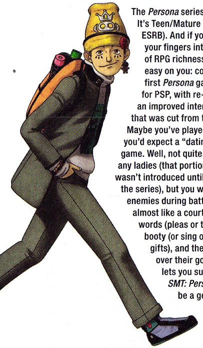
Just hope you don't find out in a later dialogue tree that this guy was crucial to finding some vital information. He may have difficulty talking now.

PlayStation Gallery

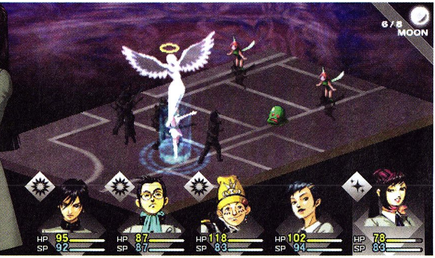
Updates, sneak peeks, and works-in-progress

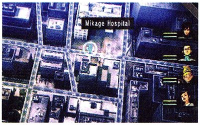
SMT: Persona Hands-On

PSP AVAILABLE: September GENRE: RPG
PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Atlus

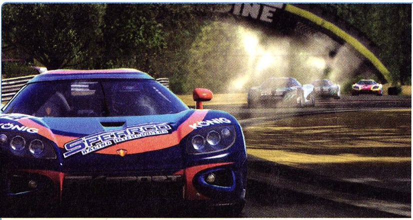


The *Persona* series is edgy. It's gloomy. It's Teen/Mature (according to the ESRB). And if you've never dipped your fingers into this dark, sweet pot of RPG richness, Atlus is making it easy on you: come September, the first *Persona* game will be remade for PSP, with re-mastered graphics, an improved interface, and content that was cut from the initial U.S. release. Maybe you've played *Persona 3* or *4*. Then you'd expect a "dating sim" element in the game. Well, not quite. You won't flirt with any ladies (that portion of the gameplay wasn't introduced until later iterations of the series), but you will "negotiate" with enemies during battle, and that plays out almost like a courtship. Say the right words (pleas or threats), shake your booty (or sing or shower them with gifts), and they'll be eager to hand over their goods—a little card that lets you summon them into battle. *SMT: Persona* should prove to be a gentle way to introduce newcomers to the series. Teresa





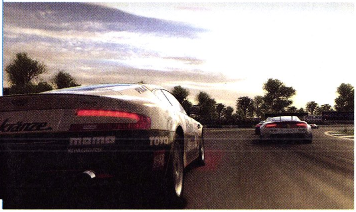
Nanjo
Snow...? Was he going to suggest
The Snow Queen?

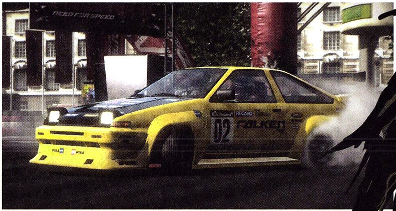


Need for Speed SHIFT Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Driving
PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: Slightly Mad Studios

Our test drive of *Need for Speed SHIFT's* latest build reveals that the…er, *shift* to simulation gameplay is nearly complete and seems expertly executed. While it won't compete head-to-head with *Gran Turismo* based on sheer car count, it's select stable of nearly 70 licensed enthusiast cars will ensure that you won't be tootling around in a Toyota Yaris. *GRID* is probably a more direct competitor for *NFS SHIFT,* but EA says its game won't have rubberbanding to keep races artificially close and its AI drivers will be capable of human-like errors in judgment and execution. But perhaps the most interesting feature of *SHIFT* is how every race—be it single player, multiplayer, or online—factors into a RPG-like driver profile system that takes into account success rate, profile points earned, and badges accrued to create a career path based around your driving style and on-track personality. Roger

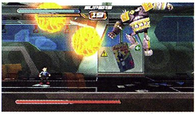


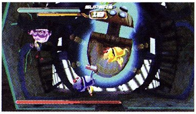


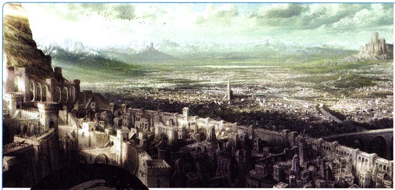
Astro Boy: The Video Game Hands-On

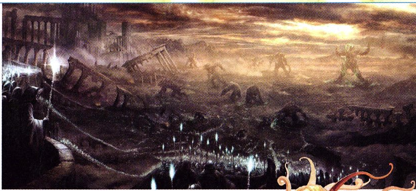
PS2/PSP AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Platformer/Shooter
PUBLISHER: D3 DEVELOPER: High Voltage Software

For everyone foaming at the mouth to see the new CG animated *Astro Boy* movie (which hits theaters in October), you've now got an accompanying game to look forward to as well. It's half platformer and half scrolling-shooter, but both play styles are set entirely on a 2D plane despite its 3D graphics (think *Street Fighter IV*). And whether you're jumping between electrified platforms or spamming the fire button as the screen scrolls perpetually to the right, you'll wield Astro's signature weapons—including his finger lasers and patented butt machine guns—as you attempt to save Metro City from the malevolent President Stone and his army of evil robots. The platforming sections that we played felt somewhat generic—though fans will be happy to know that these levels will occasionally feature areas and enemies that were cut from the film—but the shmup portion is both surprisingly difficult and uniquely fun, thanks in part to Astro Boy's unique set of skills. Attaboy! Scott





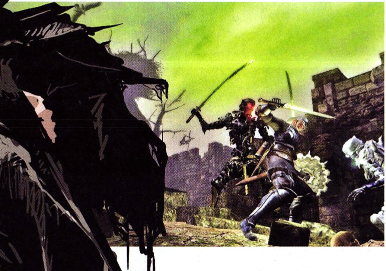


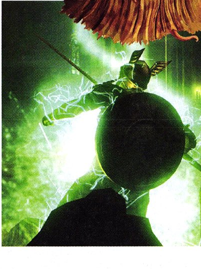


Demon's Souls Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: RPG PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: From Software

Do you enjoy being brutalized? Ever secretly dream of being beaten and humiliated in front of strangers? Welcome to *Demon's Souls,* an RPG unlike anything I've ever seen. It's "online," to an extent. You see ghostly figures of fellow gamers hacking their way through the same levels as you. You see messages on the floor left by other players who've passed that way. You see bloodstains, which replay the death scenes of the countless strangers who happened to die in that area. But you can't interact with these other gamers directly, ever, unless you "summon" one (or two) of them into your world to play cooperatively with you, or you "break into" their world…to brutally hunt them down. As if the game weren't hard enough. You may be wondering why players leave messages for strangers. Why show death animations? They're warnings, hints at what you shouldn't do, because this game is so very, very hard. Take a wrong turn and a dragon will insta-kill you. Enter the wrong room, and you'll succumb to traps. Hence, the scribbled warnings. There are no other guides, no other hints. You're totally dependant on the kindness of those who ventured and triumphed through this twisted, brutal world before you. Teresa





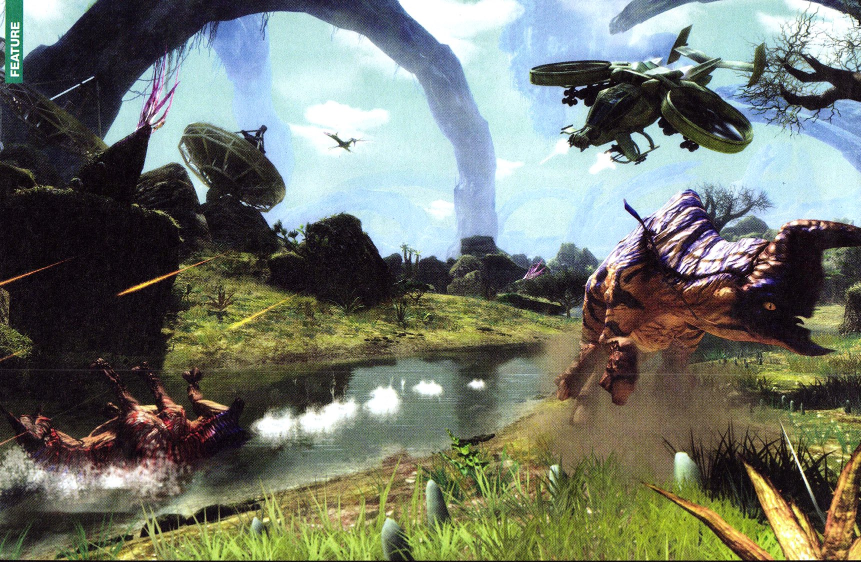
BRAVE NEW WORLD

BY ROB SMITH

James Cameron's Avatar: The Game adds a whole new dimension to the videogame landscape. It's a watershed moment in the history of this industry, and PTOM owns the very first in-depth story on what the future looks like.

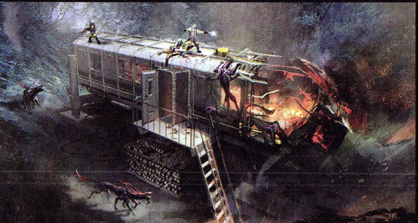
The bunker. A gray, metal, undistinguishable door in the middle of a narrow nondescript corridor. Squeaky floorboards mean a stealth-style entrance would certainly alert security. That's if I had the keycard to unlock the gray door. And the white door, three feet beyond the gray door. Then the round-the-clock security agent would want to know who I was and what I was doing. Not that I saw him, but I know he's there. Senior International Brand Manager Luc Duchaine and Producer Antoine Dodens make regular reference to him as they discuss the access restrictions enforced by Fox, the movie studio behind the project. The team on Ubisoft's *Avatar* is working deep behind lawyer lines defined in the pages of Non-Disclosure Agreements that everyone coming in contact with the project has to sign. Probably twice. My guess is that Dodens—ebullient about the opportunity to talk freely about the project for the first real time that will make print—probably had to sign it three times. Four after this article hits.

Here a team of about 250 programmers, artists, animators, level and game designers are reaching fever pitch in bringing the game adaptation of what's promised to be the biggest movie event of the year, possibly the decade, to PS3 (and those other systems, including the PSP). It's a sterile environment of tightly crammed rows of desks under which sit two computers, one the "Avatar computer" that has no outside access, and the other for each employees' email and other online requirements. Walls usually awash in the color of concept art, mission progression plans, design ideas, and brainstorm notes on "regular" game projects are instead plain primer white. "We can't have anything on the wall," explains Duchaine "because of all the windows and the chance of someone seeing what we're doing…in fact, we have special blinds that block out any view



It doesn't matter how pretty it is, if it's in the crosshairs of a RDA helicopter, it's going down.

The concept art outlines the kind of set pieces to expect, like the RDA fighting fauna clearly not fazed by fire.



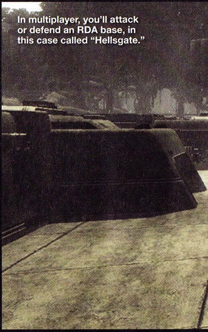
from outside." The only visible signage sits on a Red Bull fridge, packed with the developer-favorite energy drink. It said "For Avatar Wii/PSP team ONLY."

The secrecy to this point is a boon to you in that we can reveal so many details here for the first time, but a shame for a project that really does buck the perception of the movie-game. "It's the game of the movie" is often simply translated as "it's crap." (You can sorta see the point if you check out our Summer Blockbuster story on page 64). Not only does *Avatar* not appear to contain much in the way of "crap" it also feels like it could be a watershed event in videogaming history. It will usher—initially for a lucky (and wealthy) few—the dawn of true 3D gaming, and the videogaming landscape as we know it will likely never be the same again.

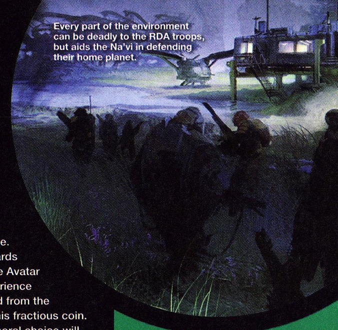
WHEN TWO TRIBES GO TO WAR

Four light years from Earth is the planet of Pandora. It's home to the nine-foot tall, blue-skinned eco-attuned warrior race, the Na'vi, and the ultra-magnetic mineral Unobtanium. Earth's energy crisis means that humankind needs the latter and will get it whatever the former has to say about the matter. To do that, and to function on a planet that's atmosphere is toxic to humans, they've ingeniously—or devilishly—developed the Avatar program.

From a safe medical location, a human's being can be projected into the Avatar body, taking Na'vi form and allowing them to breathe and function on Pandora's surface. The movie follows this premise in its own unique way, but the game doesn't follow that story, instead telling its own tale set on the same planet, but



In multiplayer, you'll attack or defend an RDA base, in this case called "Hellsgate."



Every part of the environment can be deadly to the RDA troops, but aids the Na'vi in defending their home planet.

in different circumstances. You play as Able Ryder and while the name remains the same, you can choose to be male or female and customize your look and ethnicity. And, of course, you're special; your skills as a Signal Specialist (Able, it turns out, is a slang term for your signal role) makes you ideal fodder for a mission of this kind…whatever that mission might be.

Illustrating the tighter-than-normal relationship between movie folk and game developers, I asked the movie's producer, Jon Landau, if the selectable character was something that the movie folks had to accept as part of the expected feature set of a modern videogame. "We were the ones who said we should have cultural diversity…that came from us… me," laughs Landau. So were the movie folks teaching the developers about character creation? "Entertainment, for it to be as successful as possible, has to have themes that go beyond their genre," he adds, with character development key to that. "What's really interesting in *Titanic*—have you seen it?—is that at the end 50-percent of the audience thought she died, and 50-percent thought that since Jake said she would die in her bed, and that wasn't her bed, she didn't die," says Landau, referencing the box office giant that he produced, "And with *Avatar* we want to show both experiences, as the game plays differently as the RDA than as the Avatar."

So you begin as a special RDA Corporation operative, following orders that involve controlling parts of the environment by taking out the defending Na'vi forces and destroying the glowing, bioluminescent (meaning neon-bright vegetation) flora and foliage. Shortly afterwards you'll adopt the Avatar body and experience the game world from the other side of this fractious coin. And then the moral choice will come into play and you'll choose whether to take the RDA path or the Na'vi and spend the remaining seven levels following a distinct storyline as both sides aim to find the backdoor into the

What is 3D?

We've made a big deal about the experience of playing *Avatar* in 3D (see Update story "6" in our September issue). It's amazing. It's also not going to be available to everyone. No 3D specs in the box. No green-and-red-lensed cardboard glasses muting colors and undermining the visual fidelity of Pandora. If you want *Avatar's* 3D you need a 3D-enabled TV and the stereoscopic glasses that come with them. Many newer DLP TVs (Samsung is a major manufacturer) are already 3D-enabled and were just waiting for the right application to unlock their ability. A number of plasma TVs from the likes of Samsung and Panasonic also advertise being 3D-enabled, and some even ship with cool stereoscopic viewing glasses.

Selecting 3D mode is a quick in-game option, and if you're so enabled, you'll be flung into the future of gaming.

What's important is that this 3D isn't "fling blood in your face" schlock. It's designed to immerse you in the world. The HUD isn't an overlay, but a subtle effect, messages popping up boldly to confirm successful mission objectives, more mundane information set back to be noticeable but not intrusive.

But it's all about the effects when you understand that you're seeing real depth to the environment. Leaping out of the way of a charging hammerhead (like a rhinoceros but with a hammerhead shark's, er, head) just feels to have so much more impact when that roll backwards is really towards you. Similarly, when you spray fire around the environment, it cascades and spreads in a way that engulfs the screen.

If you're not part of the 3D revolution come the November ship date, join the club, but definitely go to a big-box store to check out what the future holds.

"We're trying for minimum suckage"
– James Cameron

"Speaking from the perspective of enlightened self-interest, I'm pleased the game is coming out before the movie." – James Cameron

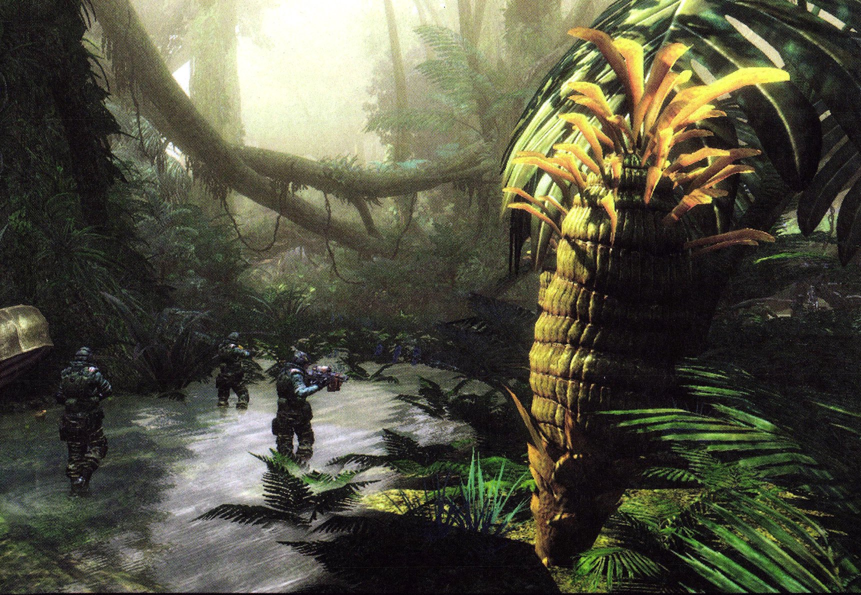
On PSP

We'd love to show you an image from the PSP version of *Avatar.* However, its storyline is different from that of the PS3 game and casts you in the role of a Na'vi warrior for the entire game. And since at press time nobody is allowed to show the alien race (although our cover offers a glimpse), we're all SOL. We did discover that this Na'vi warrior's village was destroyed by the RDA and that he's out for that most clear-minded of motives: revenge.

Avatar PSP will also incorporate some portable-to-PS3 hookupability. The team revealed that Effort Points earned in the PSP game can be transferred to your PS3 game and spent there (basically giving you a bit of a boost in the big brother version). No slam-dunk must-buy feature, but a neat integration that Sony is high on promoting.

SEC-OPS
SEC-OPS

It's all so pretty, but the RDA, armed with super-impressive flamethrowers, will torch this as soon as look at it.



Some tree pods spit out stinging insects that attack RDA soldiers, but ignore the indigenous Na'vi.

fabled Well of Souls. That's built-in replay value as on a second playthrough you can choose the other side and experience their progress through their seven levels.

Each side has a distinctive style: the RDA is classic third-person shooter action and the Na'vi is about close combat melee action. A friendly auto-target function quickly puts a target over shootable objects for the RDA. Aside from the aggressive indigenous fauna that includes plant life that can be similarly damaging, you earn Effort Points for each animal or enemy slain, and each piece of this spectacularly beautiful environment destroyed. (More on what those Effort Points are used for in a moment). The Na'vi aim to get up close and personal with vicious melee weapons like dual-wielded axes, huge clubs, and take care of their ranged needs with huge bows with which they fire three-foot long arrows. Rampaging viperwolves, boss-like hammerheads, and the majestic aerial leonoptryx all form part of a large bestiary of creatures in the way of the RDA's mining (and exploitation) efforts. The Na'vi enemy is so much more familiar: humans and their weapons. On their side, certain plant life will attack the human forces (triffid-like plants spewing pissed-off wasps) but ignore Na'vi. To balance it out, automated sentry guns will pick off roaming Na'vi while ignoring the RDA.

META-CONFLICT

Pandora is a planet engulfed in war, battles raging all across its expanse. You can influence the progress of the ongoing war by using your Effort Points in the "meta-game." Dotted around the landscape are panels that plug you into the worldview map. "It's like a game of Risk," explains Dodens, "where you expand your territory." Taking over territories by spending your Effort Points bestow small bonuses on your character. "They're not big, 50-percent increases in hit points or damage," adds Dodens, "but one-percent incremental bumps to give you a bonus." You don't have to get involved in the meta-game, but it's there.

That's not the only meta-battle involved in this ambitious project. The videogame ships before the movie, as both Landau and Cameron recognize the importance of introducing the picturesque world to its audience even before their bums nestle in movie theater seats (for potentially $14 a shot to see it in 3D). So gamers will be Pandora's first explorers. Fortunately, they won't require shots, passports, or retina scanning. But they should take notice of the environment, understand the impact that they have over everything they touch, and—in the best Hollywood tradition—come out the other side deeply appreciative of the natural world around them and how they can shape its role for future generations.

Or maybe, as both Landau and Cameron attest, gamers will just want to play with the big guns, the flamethrower, the devastation, and appreciate that the apparent bad guys don't consider themselves as such.

If *Avatar* becomes the worldwide blockbuster hit that its creators are dreaming of, expect more games, like MMOs and other ways to experience the conflict on Pandora.

PTOM TALKS TO JAMES CAMERON

"Sorry, I'm driving, I don't normally talk this loud," yells *Avatar's* visionary director, James Cameron. Not a problem. I hear him loud and clear through the cell phone as I sit in the Air Canada lounge at Montreal airport, an hour after leaving the studio where I played the game and witnessed a possible watershed moment in videogaming.

"I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me about the project," I say. "Not a problem. The movie comes out December 17th and I'll be working on it until midnight December 16th," he adds.

"I just got out of the Montreal bunker after seeing the game," I explain. "Great, did you play the demo?" he asks.

"Yes, I was pretty blown away by the whole 3D gameplay." C'mon, how else could I possibly describe it?

"I think it's wonderful what [Ubisoft] has done" he says, and after they started work on the project, "two-to-three months later they showed a very early segment when the game was a first-person shooter and we were all blown away." Later in the development cycle, the design shifted and it was recalibrated as a third-person game, adding more intrinsic connection to the characters you'll play on the RDA Corporation side, and as the indigenous alien Na'vi.

He sounds in a good mood. I'm pleased because, well, holy hell, I'm talking to James Cameron, the guy that brought us *The Abyss, Terminator,* and *Aliens.* Oh, and *Titanic,* his last movie, and far and away the highest grossing movie in Hollywood history. It's that background that affords you four years to create a movie alongside Peter Jackson's WETA special effects company. But in reality it's a project that began well before that.

"I wasn't thinking of this as a game at the time," he says of the earliest concepts, "I wrote the treatment in 1995, in the early days of prepping *Titanic,* ready to be the project after that. I was also CEO of Digital Domain and looking for something pushing 3D digital development. So it was perfectly mercenary reasons for writing *Avatar* in the first place.

But movie games usually suck. I had nothing to do with the *Terminator* games and others had mediocre gameplay. I was planning *Battle Angel* at the time, and talking to Itagaki-san and Tecmo to work in parallel on a game, so when I switched to *Avatar* I already had the thought in mind [of a game tie-in]. It was hammered home that games need time, like two years, but I'd never done a movie that went over 18 months. We thought *Avatar* would be three years, but now it's four, so it worked well for Ubi as they got six to seven months for extra gameplay."

So as you're aware of the general attitude towards movie game suckage, how did you go about avoiding that?"

Ha, we're definitely trying for minimum suckage! It occurred to us that we're using game tech for the film…low-res assets running in real-time, so we're virtually producing the movie using a game engine in principal, so we should be able to use those assets.

And how did the relationship between the movie team and the game team evolve?

[Ubisoft's] designers are very, very good, and in some cases I showed our wardrobe people and designers the game and said I want it to look like this [for the movie]…so we cannibalized what they did in some cases.

The developers needed vehicles in the game that weren't a part of the movie design, so your team at production studio Lightstorm created them, and then they were put in the movie, correct?

The vehicles appear in the background. When they came to us about vehicles we were too far down the road for them to be incorporated into major sequences. What we hope to do in the future is to start creating all the cool gear together…

"I'm going to go out and make a big movie and everyone will have to take notice." – James Cameron

Assuming we make money and we make a sequel, we'll program it in for future development; have tighter relationships that will benefit the movie and the game.

Was it important that the different platform versions had different storylines? [The PSP version—see sidebar on page 48—has a different storyline where you play solely as a Na'vi warrior.]
They exist in the same world, but they're parallel storylines and all round out parts of this new world. Speaking from the perspective of enlightened self-interest, I'm pleased the game's coming out before the movie. We need to introduce it to people.

Though it will be relatively niche at the time of launch, how important was it to have the game playable in 3D on stereoscopic-supported TVs?
It's inevitable that games will move to 3D and they could drive 3D into homes quicker or at least on a parallel track to movies. It has to get going. We were trying to kick-start it at Digital Domain and there was not enough content, and we needed to generate content. You can sit and spin on your thumb waiting for everyone to catch up... So I said I'm going to go out and make a big movie and then everyone will have to take notice.

How did you land with Ubisoft?
The primary reason was that their pitch was thinking about the psychology of who you are. The psychology of the movie is about the concept of "seeing," the Na'vi concept for understanding and changing perspectives. You go in one way and come out totally 180-degrees. Ubi came in with the idea of playing as the Na'vi and RDA, and that was great... You generally don't get to play the zombies when you're fighting as them in other action games. But the bad guys always think they're the good guys, so to switch sides in the game develops the story and is consistent with the movie's themes.

Though we know little about the movie story, from the glimpses I've seen I'd imagine that anyone who sees the movie first will want to play as the Na'vi, not the RDA.
Maybe...unless you want to go play with all those cool weapons. Big weapons aren't a new thing but the moral complexity is interesting, and I think gamers are going to like it through an action game.

So like *Star Wars* created a whole new universe mythology and now lives on through other media like games, TV, books, etc., is that how *Avatar* will likely pan out? Can we expect, say five years from now, a massively multiplayer *Avatar* set on Pandora, players playing either side?
We've absolutely talked to [Ubisoft Montreal head] Yannis Mallat and [Ubisoft CEO] Yves Guillemot about an MMO, and they said that the time is not right now, but that would be an intriguing possibility because an MMO has more narrative elements and enough hooks into the world for potential sequels, and that's an interesting development option.

You use the Lucas model and that's predicated on the first film being a hit and we don't know if it will. I've gotta trust Ubisoft to take that world, and they came up with new characters and I had just a few notes and I know they'll be in touch with the tech needed. I'll do my part, create the landscape and I could be inspired by the stuff they come up with.

And we've already talked about if we do a sequel to be even more cleverly interlaced because of the time needed. We've talked closely about revealing information in the film that lets you level up in the game, and ping-pong back and forth.

My plane is about to depart and I still don't have an assigned seat. But James Cameron is more than happy to keep talking about his project, "So to throw it back at you" he asks, "what stood out the most?"

"Well, I've been doing this game press thing for 16 years now, and only very occasionally do you see events that could signal a true shift, and in the 3D, we have that potential," I reply, placed on the spot by none other than James Cameron, and hoping not to sound like a buffoon. "It truly helps bring to life a believable, living, breathing world that's entirely plausible as an alien planet."

"Well that's great to hear as that's exactly what we're going for," he concludes.

To coin another movie's famous punctuating conclusion, for Ubisoft and James Cameron, this could be the start of a beautiful friendship. ■

Multi-dimensional multiplayer

"It's pretty straightforward," says Producer Antoine Dodens of the planned multiplayer modes in *Avatar*. The mode features 16-player battles over 10 maps, with some of them designed specifically for one of the six different game modes. They follow the familiar options:

CAPTURE THE FLAG
KING OF THE HILL
FINAL BATTLE—you protect or destroy RDA missiles
EXTRACTION—akin to a *"Left 4 Dead"* mode, according to Dodens
CONQUEST—control five locations on a map
TEAM DEATHMATCH

"It's difficult to go deeper with multiplayer because of the casual players the game is likely to attract, so we're focused on issues like how to connect, how to find friends, even how to join games...it has to be very simple," adds Dodens.

The game's weapons will be balanced slightly differently from the single-player experience, but all the hardware from that experience will be present. Not so for the vehicles, with just the buggy for the RDA and the Dire Horse for the Na'vi available to get around in this mode. And to keep the theme with the choices you're making in the single-player game, you'll always choose which side to fight for and not be forced to one that you may have morally decided not to follow! But you will only be able to experience this mode in traditional 2D.

NEW NOISE

BY SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

The NEXT WAVE of music games is about to hit! Take the PTOM MUSIC COMPATIBILITY QUIZ to determine which one best matches the beat of your soul as we go hands-on with the three biggest titles shaping the future of gaming's fastest growing genre.

What rhythm game suits *you*? Find out now!

We've crafted an ingenious, foolproof quiz that's packed so full of science and facts and stuff that the results are absolutely 100-percent guaranteed to be mostly accurate! Just answer the following four questions to find out what upcoming music game best suits your tastes and personality!

1) You're setting up for a gig when you discover that an essential piece of gear has gone missing. You…

(a) …report the apparent theft to the authorities before borrowing equipment from another band (which they happily lend you since you totally gave them brownies one time).

(b) …get super pissed off, rally the troops, and start busting heads until you find your gear. Nobody messes with your band and gets away with it!

(c) …just play it cool and shrug it off. After all, you love to improvise, and your raw talent is all you really need to give the crowd an amazing show.

2) You and your friends are going out to hit the town, but you can't decide where to go. You suggest…

(a) …this chic, kitschy coffee house downtown that also serves as a gallery for local artists. You can relax, chat, and take in the ambiance!

(b) …biker bar all the way! As Andrew W.K. famously said: "When it's time to party, we will party hard." And that's exactly what you intend to do.

(c) …this incredibly exclusive club where your friend is spinning that night. He might let you spin a set, but if not, at least you can dance!

3) Your label has hired a graphic designer to create the cover of your next album. He asks you what kind of look you're going for, so you tell him…

(a) …you just want something simple. It doesn't need to be too flashy, but it should reflect the playful yet thoughtful tone of your music.

(b) …it's gotta look tough! Lots of black, lots of skulls, lots of hot chicks. People need to know that this album is going to melt their stupid faces off!

(c) …regardless of how it looks, your name and image should be featured prominently. You're not egotistical, per se; it's just about marketing yourself.

4) Your favorite chord is…

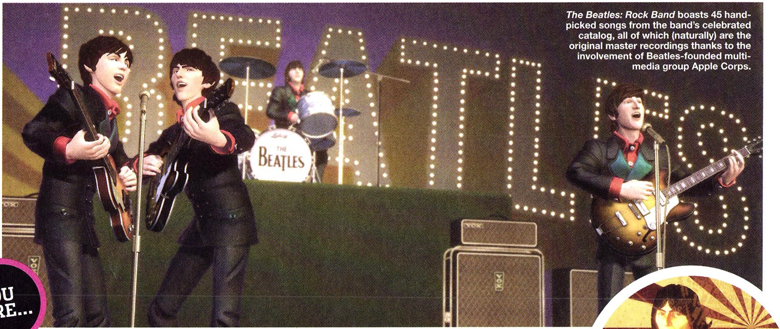
(a) …D Major seventh – A pretty, peaceful chord that lends itself well to bittersweet melodies and all sorts of unique instrumentation.

(b) …E power chord – Two notes is all you really need! Hammer one of these through your half stack and you just feel *powerful.*

(c) …B flat thirteenth – A cool, mysterious chords that introduces subtle shades of jazz and blues into any musical palette. The ultimate style chord!

Now, if you answered (a) for two or more questions, proceed to page 54. If you selected (b) two times or more, flip to page 56. And if you picked (c) twice or more, jump all the way to page 58.

Your musical destiny awaits!



The Beatles: Rock Band boasts 45 hand-picked songs from the band's celebrated catalog, all of which (naturally) are the original master recordings thanks to the involvement of Beatles-founded multi-media group Apple Corps.

YOU ARE...

PS3 | AVAILABLE: September 9 | PUBLISHER: MTV Games | DEVELOPER: Harmonix

The Beatles: Rock Band

You are a true artist. You're generally a happy, laidback person who likes to live simply, but you also possess a strong desire to see justice and peace in the world. Some might consider you a bit of a hippy...but just a little bit. You appreciate honest beauty, frown on tacky exploitation, and have the good taste to know the difference. You can often be seen wearing bright colors and Birkenstocks, and your favowrite artists include Bob Dylan, the Beach Boys, and of course, The Beatles.

If ever there was a band that didn't need an introduction, it's The Beatles. So when Harmonix secured the license to The Beatles' catalog, the dominant music game developer knew it had to raise its game, craft something classy, something worthy of such a timeless and beloved band. That's why *The Beatles: Rock Band* is arguably as much an interactive tribute as it is a rhythm game.

The centerpiece of that tribute is the Story mode, a loosely chronological tour of the band's illustrious career featuring spot-on accurate recreations of five of their most significant shows—the Cavern Club, the Ed Sullivan Show, Shea Stadium, Budokan martial arts arena, and the rooftop of the Apple Corps building. There are also psychedelic "Dreamscapes" that begin in the band's Abbey Road studio and gradually morph into abstract environments that draw on the themes of the specific song.

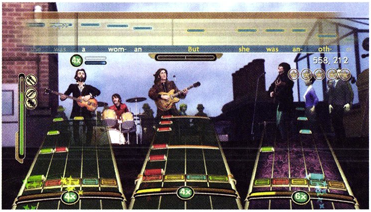
Naturally, the story mode is loaded with all sorts of Beatles history—from the stylish, moving collages that incorporate imagery of the band, to an audio clip of Ed Sullivan's actual introduction of the band when they appeared on his show. Even the band's outfits are painstakingly accurate! But the real draw is all of the unlockable content that you earn as you play, including never-before-seen photos (along with factoids confirmed by Paul McCartney himself) and unreleased audio of candid conversations between band members during recording sessions. That's huge!

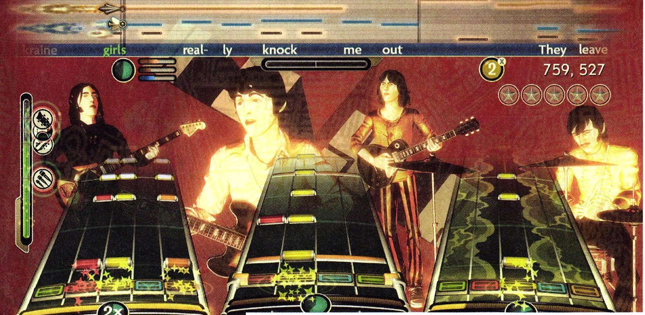
The actual gameplay hasn't received quite as extensive an overhaul, but does incorporate a few Beatles-inspired changes. Most notably, Harmonix has added support for two additional microphones and introduced vocal harmonies. The vocal chart at the top of the screen now shows up to three pitches (each in a different color) that represent the different parts of the Beatles' complex harmonies.

Fortunately for those of us who lack the band's musical gifts, harmonies can only help your score, and you can switch between the harmonies and the main melody at any time—as long as you're hitting a valid note, it counts. Plus, Harmonix has included an exhaustive vocal trainer that offers visual and audio cues to help you learn and perfect every individual vocal part in the game. The drum trainer is back as well, only this time it features beats popularized by Ringo Starr, allowing you to develop skills that will be directly applicable to the game.

> **"The Beatles: Rock Band is arguably as much an interactive tribute as it is a rhythm game."**

A multitude of other tweaks aim to make you feel that this is a fresh step forward for the *Rock Band* franchise: drum fills have been eliminated (drummers now activate Overdrive by hitting



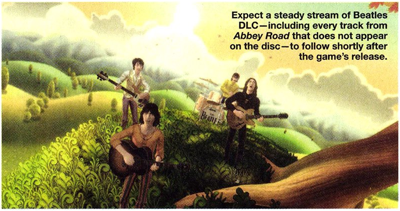


Check out the three distinct parts (blue, brown, and orange) that now appear in the vocal chart. Each represents a different pitch in the three-part harmony.

designated green notes), the whammy bar no longer alters the pitch of the note, the Easy difficulty setting is permanently set to No Fail, completing a chapter in Story mode will unlock a "chapter challenge," and all songs will be available for Quickplay from the moment you pop in the disc.

In practice, none of these minor changes deeply affect the core gameplay, but the overall experience feels incredibly tight and polished. The Beatles' musical material is a perfect fit for music games. Not only is it enjoyable to listen to, it's genuinely fun to play, with unexpected complexity belying the sweet, simple melodies of each tune. The new guitars also feel sleeker and more refined than previous models—though at $100 a pop, they ought to!

While it's a shame that you won't be able to play any of the *Rock Band* music in *The Beatles: Rock Band* (or vice versa), the game is still shaping up to be an artfully executed experience that any music fan will love and enjoy. And frankly, we're just glad to see that The Beatles and music games have finally… come together.

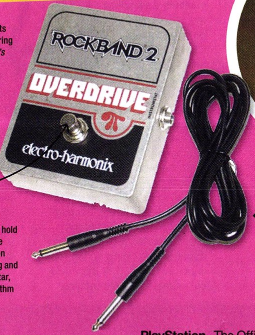


Expect a steady stream of Beatles DLC—including every track from *Abbey Road* that does not appear on the disc—to follow shortly after the game's release.

KICKING INTO OVERDRIVE

Though not specific to the Beatles game, MadCatz has partnered with real-life effects pedal manufacturer Electro-Harmonix to bring us a whole new way to activate *Rock Band's* Overdrive (aka Star Power): the Universal Overdrive Pedal!

Cleverly constructed to resemble an actual stomp box, the pedal both looks and, more *importantly,* feels authentic. The metal body of the pedal isn't super heavy-duty, but it did manage to withstand our wild stomping admirably. Not too bad considering its $29.99 price tag.



[SWITCH]

We found the switch to be a bit stiff. Unlike real pedals, you really have to hold the button down for a moment before Overdrive actually kicks in. Still, given that this will eliminate the distracting and often disastrous need to tilt your guitar, it's still one of the most practical rhythm game peripherals to date.

[PLUG]

Perhaps the biggest drawback of the pedal is the cord, which plugs directly into your guitar (sorry *Guitar Hero* fans, this means MadCatz and official *Rock Band* equipment only). The 10-foot cord is generously long, but if you like to move around while you play, it can literally be a drag.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Can't get your fill of peace, love, and rock-'n'-roll? Turn on, tune in, and drop these games to keep your Beatles-inspired buzz groovin'.

LEGO Rock Band

PS3
AVAILABLE: Q4
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive
DEVELOPER: TT Games/Harmonix

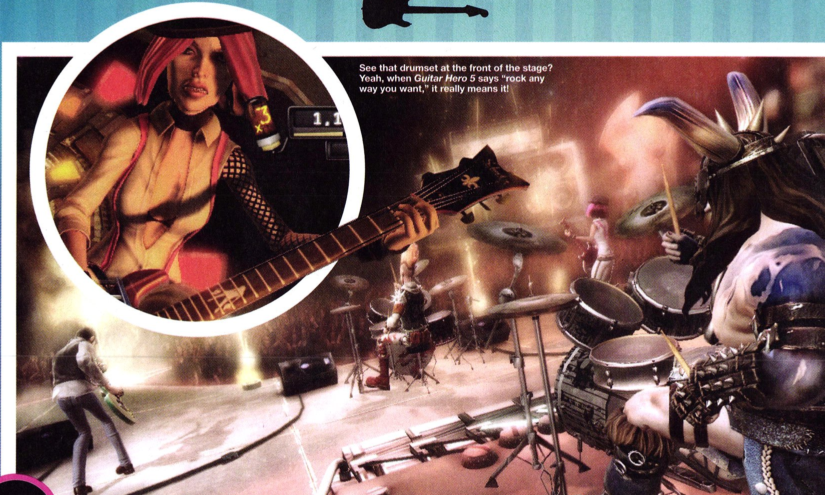
It may seem like an improbable pairing, but this latest LEGO mash-up looks to combine the endearing, playful atmosphere now synonymous with the blocky franchise with *Rock Band's* intrinsically fun gameplay. The result appears to be a family-friendly rock-'n'-roll experience that parents and their kids can enjoy together (at least, that's the idea). The game is exactly what you'd expect: the familiar scrolling-note gameplay with a LEGO skin, though a loose narrative will have you solving problems through the power of rock…possibly while dressed as a cowboy (or a skeleton or whatever you prefer). Wholesome though it may be, jaded gamers may still be tempted to check out the all new songs, like Europe's "Final Countdown." And besides, you're *never* too old to play with LEGO.

Rock Band DLC

PS3
AVAILABLE: Now
PUBLISHER: MTV Games
DEVELOPER: Harmonix

With well over 500 tracks to choose from, *Rock Band's* ever-growing library of downloadable songs provides options for all musical tastes, especially those that lean heavily towards angelic vocal harmonies and poppy acoustic guitars. Here are 10 topnotch tracks that may appeal to your Beatles-centric predilections and assuage your hunger for dreamy British boy bands as you wait for *The Beatles: Rock Band* to drop in October.

OASIS – Don't Look Back in Anger
THE WHO – Behind Blue Eyes
THE MONKEES – Last Train to Clarksville
DAVID BOWIE – Queen Bitch
THE MOTHER HIPS – Red Tandy
THE GRATEFUL DEAD – China Cat Sunflower
ELVIS COSTELLO – Radio Radio
STEELY DAN – My Old School
THE SHINS – New Slang
R.E.M. – Losing My Religion



See that drumset at the front of the stage? Yeah, when *Guitar Hero 5* says "rock any way you want," it really means it!

YOU ARE...

PS3 | AVAILABLE: September 1 | PUBLISHER: Activision, RedOctane | DEVELOPER: Neversoft

Guitar Hero 5

You're the crazy kid. You party hard but you rock even harder, and when you do, you kick ass and take names. You're always ready to prove yourself, and nothing makes you happier than putting some trash-talker in his place. But even if you lose, it's always a party! You can often be seen sporting band T-shirts, backwards hats, and studded belts, and your favorite artists include...well, anything that really rocks! Like Motörhead! Or Metallica!

"You know what I hate?," some anonymous member of the Neversoft development team declared. "Menus! To hell with menus, man! From now on, convenience is king." And thus, the seed was sown and every aspect of *Guitar Hero 5* was designed to conform to this admirable, liberating, party-friendly edict.

The start screen, for example, is an actual playable song. Seriously. Underneath the giant logo and the obligatory "Press Start" prompt is a stage full of virtual rockers belting out a random tune from the game's library of songs. And with the press of just one button, the logo instantly dissolves into a note highway and you're off. No menus, no loading, no nothing. It's a totally seamless transition into *Guitar Hero's* new Party Play mode, which eschews saving, failing, and stopping in favor of instant, effortless rocking.

And the convenience increases exponentially when you throw other people in the mix. Anybody can jump into or drop out of a song at any time; the note tracks will simply slide around the screen to accommodate the incoming or outgoing player and the song won't even pause for a moment. Same deal when changing instruments or difficulty: if one person feels he needs to make a change, he can pause just his track, make a few quick adjustments in a simplified menu, and then be counted back into the song. The music never stops once—perfect for those mid-song beer breaks!

Really the only time you *have* to stop is when you want to pick new songs, but even that can be a one-time event because you can now create custom set lists of up to 128 songs (which clearly takes DLC into account since the disc itself contains only 85 tracks). And don't worry about getting bored during your impossibly long, 128-part musical journey: not only can you jump in and out on a whim, you can play any instrument you want regardless of what the rest of the band is doing. You want four bassists? Go for it. Three drummers and a singer? Why not?

Convenience is only part of *GH5's* improvements. The career mode, for instance, has received a substantial overhaul since *World Tour,* the last true *Guitar Hero* sequel. There is now just one universal career—as opposed to a different career for each instrument—and songs no longer have to be played in preset groups.

IT'S TIME FOR A ROCK OFF!

Competition has always been the backbone of the *Guitar Hero* franchise, and in *GH5,* there will be no shortage of ways for you to show off your shredding skills. Check out all the new ways in which you'll be able to challenge your friends, both online and off.

PRO FACEOFF: A straight up head-to-head battle using the same instrument on the same difficulty setting.

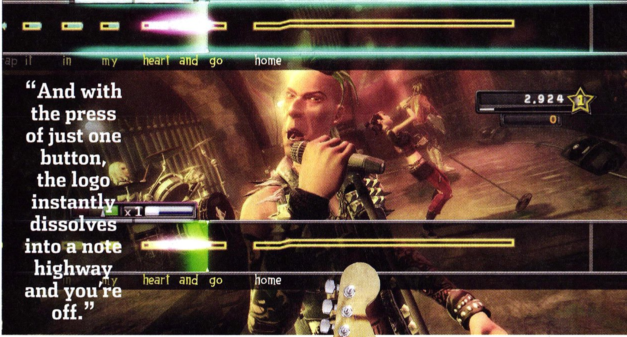
MOMENTUM: As you play, the difficulty of the song changes depending your performance, but a lower difficulty means fewer points.

PERFECTIONIST: Compete for the highest overall percentage.

ELIMINATION: The lowest scorer is eliminated at certain points over the course of the song until only one player remains.

DO-OR-DIE: Miss three notes and you're out for the rest of that section, meaning no points for you!

STREAKERS: Earn points for each note streak in multiples of 10.



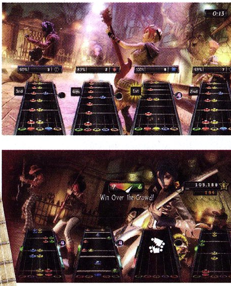
> "And with the press of just one button, the logo instantly dissolves into a note highway and you're off."

The structure is actually very similar to that of *Guitar Hero: Metallica.* Though all the songs are automatically unlocked for Party Play and Quickplay, you must earn new tracks in career mode by earning stars. Perform well, earn stars, unlock new venues (and new chunks of songs to choose from), repeat. Easy! Plus, each venue offers unique challenges—such as forcing you to achieve a certain note streak or whammy for a certain amount of time—that are optional but can earn you extra stars.

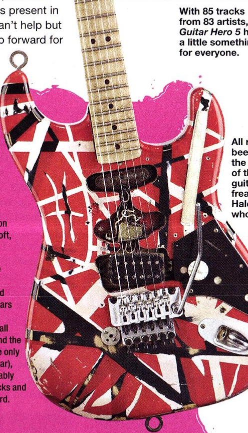
The game also sports a handsome assortment of new multiplayer modes (see above), a completely revamped music creation studio that is now more accessible (and listenable), and a handful of clever new gameplay mechanics. In multiplayer, Star Power is no longer shared, but if you happen to earn more Star Power than your meter can handle, it will overflow to your teammates instead of simply evaporating. There are also special flaming "band multiplier" notes that, when nailed in perfect unison, yield a hefty score bonus.

In practice, these improvement didn't have a tremendous impact on the gameplay (it still played like your familiar *Guitar Hero),* but they're welcome additions nonetheless. Plus, the new drop-in-drop-out mechanics definitely work as advertised. Adding players and adjusting on the fly is blissfully convenient. And we should note that this is by far the best looking game in the series: character design and animations no longer look stiff and creepy, and the lighting has improved noticeably.

The underlying gameplay may be the same as ever, but with all the improvements present in *Guitar Hero 5,* we can't help but feel this is a big step forward for the franchise.



With 85 tracks from 83 artists, *Guitar Hero 5* has a little something for everyone.



All right, who's been beating the hell out of this nice guitar?! Eddie freakin' Van Halen, that's who.

HEADBANGERS BALL

For those about to rock, we salute you! Rock harder and longer with these new additions to the *Guitar Hero* franchise.

GUITAR HERO: SMASH HITS

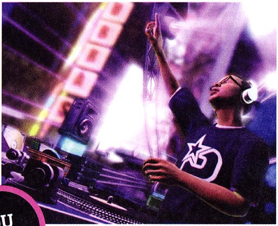
PS3, PS2
AVAILABLE: Now!
PUBLISHER: RedOctane, Activision
DEVELOPER: Beenox Studios

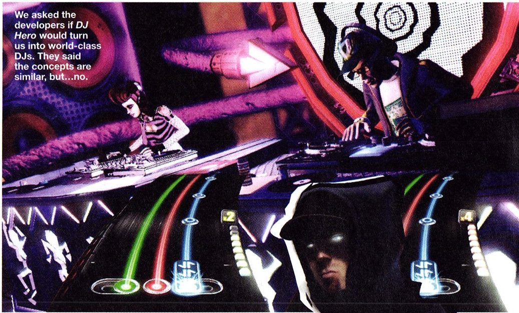
As the name implies, *Smash Hits* isn't an entirely new game but a "best of" compilation that culls tracks from the first five *Guitar Hero* games and applies them to the modern full-band formula (since those original five games did not accommodate drums, bass, or vocals). So now, instead of your friends watching you while you rip up Twisted Sister's "I Wanna Rock" on guitar, everyone can grab an instrument and join in. Plus, all 48 tracks are masters of the originals, including those that were originally just covers. Sadly, *Smash Hits* doesn't offer much beyond playing old music in a new way since the career mode is borrowed directly from *GH Metallica* and the game features no truly original content beyond a handful of new venues. But the song list is quality!

GUITAR HERO: VAN HALEN

PS3, PS2
AVAILABLE: Q4
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft, Budcat Creations

A few months ago those Metallica guys got a game. Replace "Metallica" with "Van Halen" and you've got a pretty good idea what to expect from *Guitar Hero: Van Halen*—a full band experience and a simplified, star-based career mode that stars the titular band. Unfortunately this means the game will not contain any of *GH5's* innovative new features, but it's really all about the Rock legends. That means authentic stages, behind the scenes info, and of course, the band itself. Though the game only features the band's current members (sorry, no Sammy Hagar), you can unlock classic costumes that capture the unforgettably hilarious fashion of the '80s. Expect about 25 Van Halen tracks and another 19 from "inspired" artists like Weezer and Yellowcard.





We asked the developers if *DJ Hero* would turn us into world-class DJs. They said the concepts are similar, but...no.

YOU ARE...

PS3 | Available: October 27
Publisher: Activision
Developer: FreeStyle Games

DJ Hero

You are an individual. You're generally cool and collected, but every now and then, your passionate creativity transforms you into the life of the party. You've got real style and can dance to anything with a beat. You're effortlessly on top of all the latest fashion trends—or maybe it's just that you can make anything work for you. Your tastes are eclectic, but your favorite artists include Kanye West, Radiohead, and all the hippest underground DJs.

Guitars are so 2006. Sure those *Beatles* and *Guitar Hero* games look fine, but people are ready for something new, something exciting...something like *DJ Hero,* a game that casts you as the world's latest up-and-coming mix master and stands you at the business-end of a turntable. And don't let the name fool you: despite the *Hero* element of the title, this isn't a hastily constructed attempt to exploit a franchise's popularity. This is something entirely new.

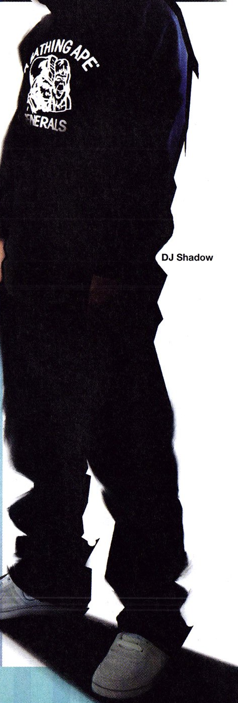
The music found in *DJ Hero,* for instance, is unlike that of any other rhythm game. Every track is actually a mash-up of two popular songs custom created just for the game...meaning every single song is an original piece you can't hear anywhere else. And what makes this groundbreaking approach all the more exciting is the jaw dropping roster of musical talent making these mixes possible: Grandmaster Flash, DJ Shadow, Eminem, Jay-Z, the list just goes on (and many of them actually appear as playable characters)!

> **Every track is actually a mash-up of two popular songs custom created just for the game...**

Not every track is the brainchild of some superstar artist, but developer FreeStyle's army of in-house DJs has assembled some unexpectedly awesome combinations as well (see Mix and Mismatches sidebar for our favs). In all, the game offers over 80 unique mixes featuring over 100 licensed songs...and it would be a mistake to assume that *DJ Hero's* repertoire is limited to rap: R&B, electronica, even rock all appear somewhere in the game's set list.

But more important than the music is the fact that the game *feels* fundamentally different from its *Hero* stablemates. Sure it requires some of the same skills—it is a "rhythm" game after all—but the emphasis isn't simply on matching notes that scroll towards you. That's still part of the control scheme, but you may also have to crossfade to one side of the track, instantly catch and scratch a note while hammering the sample button, then quickly fade to the opposite side of the track where you have to catch a series of notes and tweak the effects knob to rack up some extra points. And that's just on Medium difficulty.

In the higher difficulties you not only have more notes to handle, you also have to match a preset pattern when scratching. Oh, and if you manage to do all this well enough, you might be able to charge the Rewind meter, which lets you replay any section of any song for a chance



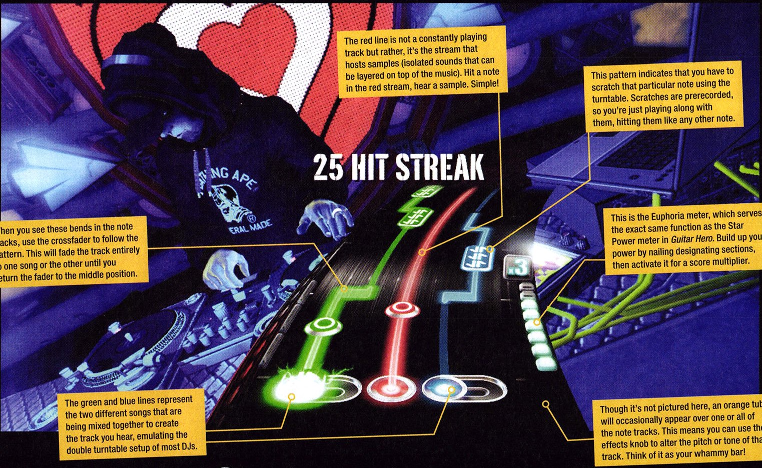
DJ Shadow

MIX AND MISMATCHES

Jay-Z meets Rick James? Grandmaster Flash crossed with Gary Numan? Better believe it. *DJ Hero's* outrageous mash-ups—all of which mix two well-known tracks together to create something entirely new—offer all kinds of unexpected combinations. We pick our Top 5 favorites:

- ➔ Blondie "Atomic" vs. Gorillaz "Feel Good Inc"
- ➔ Marvin Gaye "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" vs. Gorillaz "Feel Good Inc"
- ➔ DJ AM – Beastie Boys "Intergalactic" vs. Bel Biv Devoe "Poison"
- ➔ DJ Z Trip – Public Enemy "Bring The Noize (20xx)" vs. Justice "Genesis"
- ➔ DJ Jazzy Jeff – LL Cool J "Rock The Bells" vs. The Aranbee Pop[...] "Bittersweet Symphony"

A NEW SPIN ON GAMEPLAY



The red line is not a constantly playing track but rather, it's the stream that hosts samples (isolated sounds that can be layered on top of the music). Hit a note in the red stream, hear a sample. Simple!

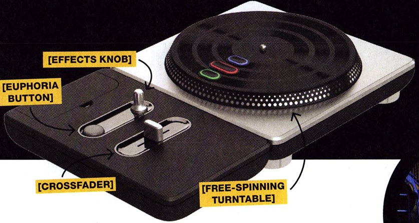
This pattern indicates that you have to scratch that particular note using the turntable. Scratches are prerecorded, so you're just playing along with them, hitting them like any other note.

When you see these bends in the note tracks, use the crossfader to follow the pattern. This will fade the track entirely to one song or the other until you return the fader to the middle position.

This is the Euphoria meter, which serves the exact same function as the Star Power meter in *Guitar Hero*. Build up your power by nailing designating sections, then activate it for a score multiplier.

The green and blue lines represent the two different songs that are being mixed together to create the track you hear, emulating the double turntable setup of most DJs.

Though it's not pictured here, an orange tube will occasionally appear over one or all of the note tracks. This means you can use the effects knob to alter the pitch or tone of that track. Think of it as your whammy bar!



to earn some extra points or just for fun.

The whole affair requires a great deal more coordination than the strum-bar-plus-fret-button mechanics of the guitar games…which now seem simplistic by comparison. But because of this, the whole experience feels fresh and the sense of accomplishment that came with conquering *Guitar Hero* all those years ago has been renewed. Despite the fact that we've never actually sat behind a real set of turntables, playing *DJ Hero* made us feel like the über-cool beat chemists we always knew we could be.

The career mode consists of "set lists" that you work through to earn stars, which unlock more set lists. You can create and customize a character and deck, and all tracks are available for Quickplay from the start of the game, which is great for creating your own set lists. And of course, you can battle other DJs in head-to-head competition or have a friend pick up a guitar for the 10 special crossover co-op songs.

But really, *DJ Hero's* stellar gameplay and track list might have us exchanging our guitars for turntables very, very soon. ■

THE RIVALS!

East coast/West coast it don't matter. If you need more than one DJ hero, check out these other bumpin' games.

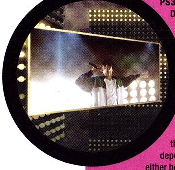
SCRATCH: THE ULTIMATE DJ

PS3 | AVAILABLE: Q4 | **PUBLISHER:** Genius Products
DEVELOPER: 7 Studios

DJ Hero isn't the only game looking to turn hip-hop's massive popularity into a compelling interactive experience. With a similar roster of musical contributors (including the Beastie Boys and Gorillaz) and a turntable peripheral of its own, *Scratch* appears to be the obvious rival to *Hero*, but its gameplay is more similar to the established mechanics of guitar-based games than *DJ Hero*—though it does feature an intriguing creative twist. The "Scratch Deck" peripheral features five sequencer buttons that you use to hit scrolling notes in time with a song (sound familiar?), but you can also add notes, effects, and scratches at just about any time, allowing you to create an instant remix on the fly. Unfortunately, lawsuits have made the future of this game slightly hazy, but we still expect it to ship later this year.

DEF JAM RAPSTAR

PS3 | AVAILABLE: Q4 | **PUBLISHER:** TBD
DEVELOPER: 4mm Games, Terminal Reality



It's a *SingStar*-style game with hip-hop. What more do you need to know?! Test your vocal dexterity in more than 100 tracks—spanning every era and style of the genre—and upload clips of your performances to the game's community website, where you can form crews, share videos, and even challenge others to rap battle. And when you're not showing off online or honing your skills on the latest T.I. track, you can actually practice your own rhymes over any number of pre-recorded beats. We're still waiting for more details—like the full track list—but we've seen the game in action, and depending on the skill of the person behind the mic, the results can either be awe-inspiring or hilarious.

DIRECT FEED

BY ROB SMITH

Funneling your digital media—video, photos, and music—to the living room big-screen TV is the dream of the techno-geek cognoscenti (aka the smart kids). With your PlayStation 3 serving as the beating heart pumping this digital blood throughout your house, it's easier and cheaper than you might think. How do you do it? What pitfalls to expect? We've tested and trialed, updated and upgraded to show you the way.

DAMN YOU, INTERNET

Bandwidth, package transfer rates, DLNA connections, the Internet. Wires, walls, distance, the weather. All these variables mean your media streaming performance will be different from ours and from your neighbors. Remember that there are no absolutes when dealing with digital media transfer and your experience can even change from day to day (maybe even hour to hour). It's always tempting to fiddle with settings and system details, when in fact a problem you might have encountered could simply be a localized anomaly that'll disappear as quickly and quietly as it appeared.

OUR SETUP:

- AT&T Elite DSL
- Home PC in spare room/office with wireless connection
- Linksys WRT54GS wireless router set to run at 802.11g speed

Simple fact: you need as much wireless speed as possible when running data through the ether. An 802.11n router is recommended, but we did manage great performance from several services with a .11g connection.

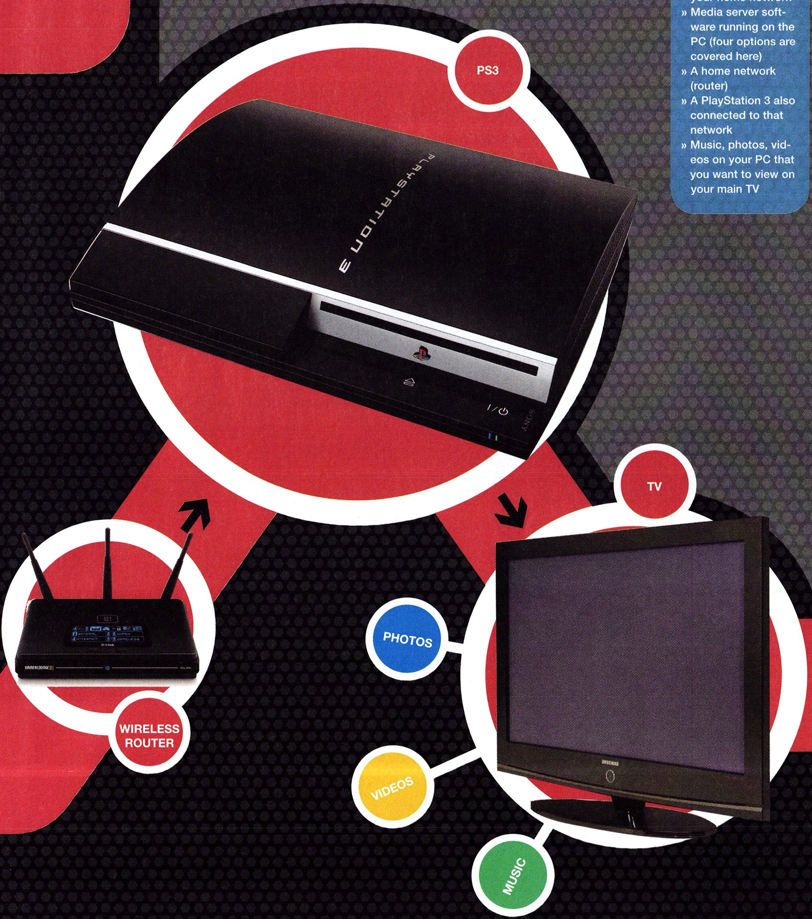
Why do this? The Blu-ray/DVD drive means that your hard-media video viewing options are covered, but with so much content available digitally, your PC can now be a huge storage solution. Copying individual TV show episodes to a flash drive and playing through the USB connection is a simple option, but to have all your library available at once adds flexibility to your viewing choices.

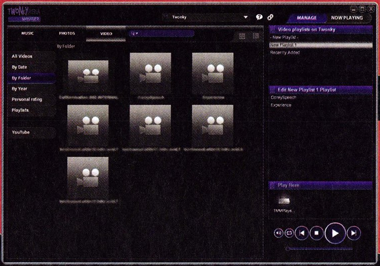
We've used four software options to power your media server, all offering slightly different features and performance options. Note that each of these software suites is updated consistently, so interface tweaks and additional functions could come online in the months ahead.

PC MEDIA SERVER
COOLER MASTER

WHAT YOU NEED

- A PC connected to your home network
- Media server software running on the PC (four options are covered here)
- A home network (router)
- A PlayStation 3 also connected to that network
- Music, photos, videos on your PC that you want to view on your main TV


PS3
WIRELESS ROUTER
TV
PHOTOS
VIDEOS
MUSIC



Twonky's interface is clean and easy to navigate. Hit the gears icon at the top to access the server settings to tell the software the files and folders to stream.

PHOTOS

VIDEOS

TWONKY MEDIA

www.twonkymedia.com / Free trial; $39.95

On the PC that will act as your server, download and install the TwonkyMedia Manager software. Click on the gears icon to the top of the screen to choose your Server Settings. You need to point the software to the location of your media (it defaults to My Documents/My Music, Pictures, and Videos respectively). Under the Media Feeds tab you can direct the software to your selections of music through Internet radio and SHOUTcast, photos hosted on PhotoBucket, Flickr, and PicassaWeb, and videos from YouTube. In each instance, input your username on these other services to enable access to your video favorites, photostreams, etc., through your PS3.

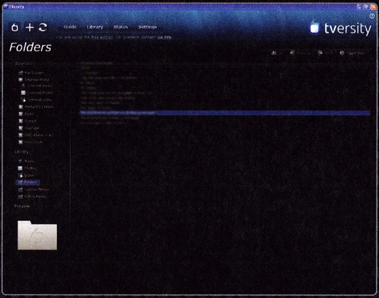
The media manager software does offer a few other options for you to fiddle with, but essentially that's all that's needed. Now turn on your PS3, go to the Video tab on the XMB, and you should see the Twonky logo with the name you designated as the server. Select the video option and several folder choices will appear. Navigate through to find your selection, and hit X to play.

Note: The PS3 has an incredibly useful video navigation function by hitting the square button.

Possible pitfalls: If the Twonky media server is not showing you may need to check your server settings along the route: the PC, the router, the PS3. Make sure sharing is enabled. If the video file can't be played on the PS3 you may want to try TVersity as your media server as that allows on-the-fly encoding of video files to a format that the PS3 will read.

Bottom line: Simple installation and setup options. The full $40 version allows streaming of your digital media from several other online sources.

Its use of video codecs make TVersity incredibly versatile. However it's not the slickest interface (though that will likely improve with updates).



MUSIC

TVERSITY

www.tversity.com / Free ($29.95 Pro version)

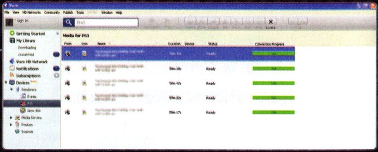
We found TVersity to be an incredibly robust, powerful media server solution for the right price (free, and that includes most of the functionality you'll need). Setup involves more steps than Twonky due to its use of the ffdshow video codecs that need to be installed to allow it to perform its on-the-fly encoding. We found that accepting all the default installation options (and there are a number of screens to navigate) was all that's needed, though it can be intimidating to accept so many questions about complex issues regarding video file formats that you've likely never encountered before.

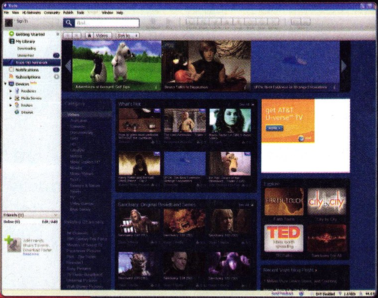
Again, you have to tell the software the location of your media files, but the interface has been improved over the last several iterations to make navigation and organization of your files pretty straightforward.

Video playback quality was excellent through TVersity, and it was very robust, retaining a solid connection over our .11g connection to the PS3. As a result, it had become our default go-to source as it handled every video file we threw at it!

Possible pitfalls: The video codec library will, for most people it seems, provide everything you need while not screwing up any settings that allow you to view media locally on that PC. However, it is a fairly daunting process, which makes troubleshooting any particular hiccups a pain (likely involving several hours scouring tech-speak–drenched message boards).

Bottom line: Great price for the basic setup; vast array of video file types supported and encoded on the fly to play on the PS3; but not as obviously user-friendly as other options.


Vuze
File View HD Networks Community Publish Tools Window Help
Sign In
Getting Started
My Library
Downloading
Unwatched
Vuze HD Network
Notifications
Subscriptions
Devices
Renderers
iTunes
Xbox 360
Media Servers
Routers
Internet
Delete
Media for PS3
From Icon Name Duration Device Status Conversion Progress
58m 18s Ready
58m 42s Ready
59m 22s Ready
58m 17s Ready


Vuze
File View HD Networks Community Publish Tools Window Help
Sign In
Getting Started
My Library
Downloading
Unwatched
Vuze HD Network
Notifications
Subscriptions
Devices
Renderers
Media Servers
Routers
Internet
Videos
Sort by
What's Hot
get AT&T U-verse TV
Explore
EARTH-TOUCH
city by city
TED
Sanctuary: Original Broadband Series
Friends (0)
Online (0)
Edit / Add

The HD Network is a great source of video content, with movie trailers, original shorts, and other videos providing a ton of content to browse and stream at your leisure.

VUZE

www.vuze.com / Free

Let's be clear, bit torrents are a legal minefield best avoided entirely rather than potentially running foul of federal investigators hoping to pin the world's problems on kids sharing their digital content. However, this software is legal, and the media server capabilities packaged into Vuze (formerly known as Azureus) makes it worth considering here. Once installed and your PS3 is recognized on the network, Vuze will display a PS3 icon under the Devices>Renderers header (any other media servers on the network will show in Media Servers header below it). Now you need to drag and drop the files you want to share onto the icon. When you do that you're asked if you want to stream high or standard definition. We've had no problems streaming using the high definition option in our setup.

Note: The media server element is a side-service from Vuze's original purpose as a torrent client, so it's still relatively new, and no doubt will evolve in future iterations. That said, the site hosts the Vuze HD Network tab that showcases original shorts, movies, trailers, and more across sci-fi, sports, videogames, cars, girls, comedy—y'know, the lifeblood of any PlayStation 3 owning male!

Possible pitfalls: Jail; usability is not as streamlined as other software. Some file types may not play through Vuze.

Bottom line: Provides an all-in-one solution if you're viewing its HD files through the network. Incorporation of Friends List functions reinforces the community spirit of sharing this content.

PLAYON

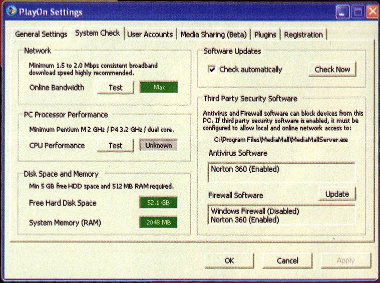
www.themediamall.com / $39.99

Here's one to watch. PlayOn's claim here is to stream video content from several online sources you might already be using. Most intriguing: Netflix! Big deal for the "other console" guys, but PlayOn provides a method of connecting to your Netflix account (input username and password on the User Accounts tab, as well as YouTube and the recently nerfed Hulu). Technically, it works, though its organization of folders that you browse through when viewing on your PS3 is a little archaic. We managed to stream several files through our Netflix account, but the video quality was generally poor. That's acceptable for '80s British TV shows available through the Instant Play option, but unwatchable in the movies we managed to stream. Subtitles and other on-screen text was blurred sufficiently to be unreadable, though the pixilated picture streamed smoothly. (A stronger online connection night improve this quality level, but "buyer beware" if you're expecting DVD quality playback.)

Streaming low quality YouTube videos (meaning all of them) was a cinch, as was picking up the day's sports highlights on the ESPN channel. For sports fans, this one is quite impressive, providing every channel within the ESPN network (so for this fan, getting the daily ESPN Soccernet segments was matched only by an impressive back catalog of the biggest horse races).

The CBS channel played full episodes from the original *Star Trek* series (a perfect opportunity to see Mirror, Mirror again), as well as the original *Beverly Hills 90210!* Take it or leave it. The late night shows are also available, so between a peek at primetime, a hint of late night, and a splash of classics, this stream seemingly provides hours of entertainment through PlayOn.

But the kicker for PlayOn could be the "mod" community. A positive attitude to independent developers has resulted in fans creating plug-ins to stream content from other video sources. We created the folder Plugins in Program Files>MediaMall, downloaded the GameTrailers TV file from www.playonplugins.com to that folder. After restarting the PlayOn server (right-click the icon in the task bar, select Stop PlayOn, then double-click the icon—or select it in the Start menu—to restart the media server) the plugin channels should appear on your PS3. Check the playonplugins.com site for the latest on sites added to the roster.


PlayOn Settings
General Settings
System Check
User Accounts
Media Sharing (Beta)
Plugins
Registration
Test
Test
Check Now
Update
OK
Cancel
Apply

Network

Minimum 1.5 to 2.0 Mbps consistent broadband download speed highly recommended.

Online Bandwidth: Max

PC Processor Performance

Minimum Pentium M 2 GHz / P4 3.2 GHz / dual core.

CPU Performance: Unknown

Disk Space and Memory

Min 5 GB free HDD space and 512 MB RAM required.

Free Hard Disk Space: 52.1 GB

System Memory (RAM): 2048 MB

Software Updates

☑ Check automatically

Third Party Security Software

Antivirus and Firewall software can block devices from this PC. If third party security software is enabled, it must be configured to allow local and online network access to:

C:\Program Files\MediaMall\MediaMallServer.exe

Antivirus Software

Norton 360 (Enabled)

Firewall Software

Windows Firewall (Disabled)
Norton 360 (Enabled)

PlayOn could evolve into a powerful one-stop shop for your video streaming content needs. Community-built plug-ins add huge potential.

Possible pitfalls: Whichever way you dice it, the Netflix service, though sorta functional in our tests just isn't capable of the smooth quality available with those other console folk.

Bottom line: If ESPN, CBS, and YouTube are part of your daily video viewing diet, then PlayOn is already performing. The potential for other plug-ins to popular online destinations (such as GameTrailers TV) makes PlayOn the intriguing wild card on the streaming block.

THE BLOCKBUSTERS OF SUMMER

The freewheeling days of summer are nearly gone. School is, like, tomorrow. How you can you extend these halcyon days just a little longer?

By Douglass C. Perry

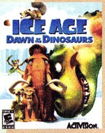
And...action! The big Hollywood guns have delivered their entertainment payload this summer with an armada of movies. With multi-million dollar budgets, videogame, fast food, and sweepstake tie-ins, the only way these box-office sluggers *couldn't* have grabbed your attention is if you took a trip to the moon. Even in orbit, you'd probably see the countless billboards or hear the sound of destruction. Videogame publishers have delivered games for all of this summer's spectacles, and they're all big, loud, and crunchy.

One way or another you're going to see these movies and, assuredly, play these games. In our end-of-summer homage to these blockbusters, we've corralled all of the biggest summer games, devoured every one, and have rated them on the take-it-to-the-bank popcorn scale!

ICE AGE: DAWN OF THE DINOSAURS

Crash Bandicoot in dinosaur's clothing

SYSTEMS PS3, PS2 | **PRICE** PS3: $49.99; PS2: $29.99 | **ESRB** Everyone
PUBLISHER Activision | **DEVELOPER** Eurocom



When wildly successful games like *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon* didn't gain the same traction in the PS2/Xbox/GameCube era as they did in the 32-bit era, platformers were said to have died a sad, strange death.

But here's a little secret: They didn't really die. They retired and moved to Hollywood.

Whereas *Up's* all-too-familiar formula aims at a younger audience with really simple challenges and soft animated cuteness, *Ice Age* goes for the tweens, essentially delivering *Crash Bandicoot* in a dinosaur costume. It must be said that this is a polished, clever game packing an assortment of play styles into a friendly, funny, but generic package. You'll fly a pterodactyl, roll stolen dino eggs through the snow and skid across slick ice as Sid, race after elk as Diego, ride on Rhinos, confront clans of raptors as Buck, stomp on beavers as Manny, and engage in a classic 2D side-scrolling collect-a-thon as Scrat.

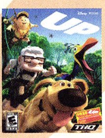
A fruit-and-nut based economy and the collectible apples just scream *Crash Bandicoot*—but hey, Naughty Dog didn't trademark collectible apples, they just permanently burned collecting apples into our brains forever. Still, you can upgrade ammo and life reserves, unlock new modes including a variety of two-to-four–person multiplayer games, and though it's a single-player platformer at heart, the movie is front and center. If you watched it, you'll enjoy it in game form. And if you didn't see it, you'll get a solid interactive version of the movie. Just don't expect any innovation, genre bending, or anything even remotely new.

Score: ●●●●●●●○○○

UP

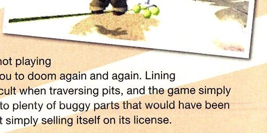
Platforming on the up and up

SYSTEMS PS3, PS2, PSP | **PRICE** PS3: $39.99; PS2: $19.99PSP: $29.99;
ESRB Everyone | **PUBLISHER** THQ | **DEVELOPER** Heavy Iron Studios



No bones about it: *Up* is as straightforward a movie-based platformer as they come. Based directly on the movie, *Up* lets you play old man Carl Fredricksen, who is moving his house to Paradise Falls via helium balloons (standard procedure, right?), and young Russell, a Wilderness Explorer who is working with Carl to earn his Assisting the Elderly Badge. Together they go on an adventure made for the youngest gamers in your family.

With the ability to switch characters throughout, you'll run through every single traditional platformer trick in the book. You'll climb vined ledges, shimmy Russell across steep cliff walls, and team up to electrocute giant anaconda bosses. You'll wield Carl's cane to swat enemies and Russell's backpack to batter bad guys, collect insects, and gather balloons, and team up with an exotic bird named Kevin and Dug the talking dog to reach special spots on the map. It's simple and charming.



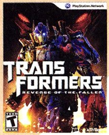
Up isn't without its faults. The tag team mechanic—that pulls whichever character you're not playing toward you—will introduce you to doom again and again. Lining up jumps using Kevin is difficult when traversing pits, and the game simply isn't polished as you'll run into plenty of buggy parts that would have been smoothed out on a game not simply selling itself on its license.

Score: ●●●●●●○○○○

TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN

Revenge of the meh is more like it

SYSTEMS PS3, PS2, PSP | **PRICE** PS3: $59.99; PS2: $29.99; PSP: $39.99 | **ESRB** Teen | **PUBLISHER** Activision | **DEVELOPER** Luxoflux



For all of the complaints the first *Transformers* game endured, the curiously unpolished and often awkward sequel poses entirely new ones. *Revenge of the Fallen* loosely appears to follow the movie narrative, but eliminates nearly every story element, leaving you wondering if this is indeed based on the film at all. If your idea of the story is watching robots standing around in their headquarters moving their heads and arms and talking about assorted crises, you're in luck. If you were expecting cutscenes or action from the movie, you'll find none here.

Revenge of the Fallen does a poor job of capturing the mechanical power and distinct abilities of the Autobots and Decepticons, as they continue their ongoing battle on Earth for the remaining Allspark chip. The single-player mode plays out differently based on the side you choose, but lets you sample each side's colorful array of role players (from Bumblebee and Ironhide to Optimus Prime and Starscream among others). The missions show little range, however, and become increasingly repetitive. But the destruction never stops as you're able to blow up nearly everything on screen, climb up buildings, and depending on the robot, drive, fly, or hover. Multiplayer offers five modes of play and is rather entertaining, giving the game a little boost of diversity and fun, which surprisingly, you'll be hungry for after the single-player campaign.

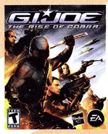
The game's biggest issue, sadly, is the controls. Was there not a better way to transform into a vehicle than holding R2, and then switching up the weapons controls along with it? An important note for PS2 owners: The PS2 version is more simplistic than its PS3 brethren, but it's a more directly satisfying experience than its bungling brother.

Score: ●●●●●●○○○○

G.I.JOE: THE RISE OF COBRA

Gung Ho for Shipwreck?

SYSTEMS PS3, PS2, PSP | **PRICE** PS3: $49.99; PS2: $29.99; PSP: $39.99
ESRB Teen | **PUBLISHER** Electronic Arts | **DEVELOPER** Double Helix



There's a little bit of everything in EA's *G.I. Joe* movie tie-in—the good, the bad, and the fugly. Fans of the old Saturday morning cartoon are in luck. Duke, Scarlett, Snake Eyes, and blood-brother Storm Shadow, among others, renew their roles, don cool new suits probably recycled from the *Matrix* movies costume pile, and say brutish, mean things to each other—just like old times. The bevy of unlockable intelligence cards, playable characters, and bonus content also should ignite fans' fond memories.

After that short wave of nostalgia wears off, you'll realize *The Rise of Cobra* ain't all that pretty in any area. In theory, it aspires to combine a little *Gauntlet* and a touch of *R-Type.* Along with a friend or using the default AI, you'll fight various tiers of Cobra thugs, collect intel and bonus items that boost firepower or bolster each character's special attacks (Duke's grenades and Scarlett's three-pronged fire arrows, for example), and confront an assortment of bullet- and missile-spraying devices to keep you moving.

The two-player cooperative option is *G.I. Joe's* biggest strength. It lets you blast through Cobra's various bases, rescue and unlock playable characters, pilot powerful tanks (that handle even worse than you imagine a tank might, by the way), and engage in boss fights that will take more determination and skill to complete than one would expect. When each player builds up enough points, both Joes can team up and don Accelerator Suits, rendering them invulnerable and boosting their firepower for a limited time. The first time I fought Storm Shadow, this feature came in real handy.

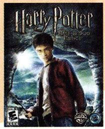
In all, *Rise of the Cobra* will probably satisfy only two types of people: the hardest-core *G.I. Joe* fans, and fathers and sons, freshly anaesthetized from the movie's non-stop action.

Score: ●●●●○○○○○○

HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE

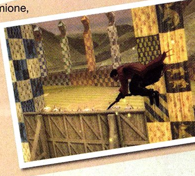
Does the Half-Blood Prince lift the movie-license curse on videogames?

SYSTEMS PS3, PS2, PSP | **PRICE** PS3: $49.99; PS2: $29.99; PSP: $39.99
ESRB Everyone 10+ | **PUBLISHER** Electronic Arts | **DEVELOPER** Bright Light Studio



The sixth and most recent *Harry Potter* movie makes a decidedly better movie than it does a game. While the PS3 game doesn't capture the sparkly imagination or the emotional current the new movie delivers, there is a certain quality, a particular "magic" if you will, to this game that's hard to quantify.

This third-person action-adventure game follows the movie's narrative, the uncovering of the Half-Blood Prince, and key characters Harry, Hermione, and Ron, as they engage in romances and struggle through their sixth year at Hogwarts. While occasionally switching characters—controlling Ron when Romilda Vane slips him tainted chocolates or Ginny as she captains the Gryffindor Quidditch team—you'll play as Harry using a stubborn third-person camera system that often gets in the way of aiming, seeing, and moving.



Still, it's quite fun making potions, dueling (and crushing) bullies, and collecting crests, mini-crests, and badges. In a strange way, *The Half-Blood Prince* is like *Bully,* or even *Sid Meier's Pirates!*—the collective assortment of challenges and mini-games adds up to a greater overall experience than the mini-games themselves and creates a cohesive level of story-telling, action, and exploration.

Score: ●●●●●●●○○○

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RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Win junk from Rob's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "October Ratings" to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues

1) **Batman: Arkham Asylum** p. 70 ★★★★★
2) **Prototype** | PS3 | Sept 09 ★★★★
3) **Fight Night Round 4** | PS3 | Aug 09 ★★★★★
4) **Wolverine** | PS3 | July 09 ★★★★
5) **Patapon 2** | PSP | June 09 ★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

Batman has Gotham, Superman has Metropolis, but what cities would the PTOM crew protect?

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Livermore? As in Livermore, CA. The seemingly sleepy East Bay commuter town is Rob's choice. Oh, it's home to 40-plus wineries. Now it makes sense. Protecting the choicest cabernets and syrahs from the ravages of...um, what exactly? So what you're saying, Rob, is that you'd use your superpowers to be a weed killer and bug spray. Noble. So very noble.

NOW PLAYING: *Batman: Arkham Asylum, Avatar, FIFA Soccer 10, InFamous*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Maybe she doesn't have her head on straight, but Teresa would be the personal superhero of Hogsmeade Village (the magical town near Hogwarts). Come on, isn't butterbeer and Honeydukes Sweetshop worth protecting? Plus, it'd mean she'd rub elbows with famous wizards. Plus, if she were the superhero of a wizard town, wouldn't that make her a wizard too?

NOW PLAYING: *Dissidia Final Fantasy, FFVII* (on PSP!), *Battlefield 1943*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Unable to settle on just one city, Ken chooses Liverpool, England and Paris, France. Liverpool, obviously, for his beloved Footie club and spawning The Beatles earns it bonus points. Paris, because it's where he got engaged (we'll say it for Teresa: "Awww...") But hopefully Ken's superpower is splitting in two or there's going to be a lot trips through the Chunnel. Actually, being a one-man Dynamic Duo sounds cool.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*, but anxiously awaiting *FIFA Soccer 10*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

Carlos the Intern figures if episodes of *Reno 911* are any indication, the crime rate in Reno is high, but manageable. There seems to be all sorts of misdemeanors a young superhero could take care of. Actually, he might not even need superpowers, just as long as the crimes don't get any worse than indecent exposure (as often is the case.) Champion of the biggest little city in the world...awesome.

NOW PLAYING: *Shadow of the Colossus, Condemned 2, Sonic Ultimate Collection*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

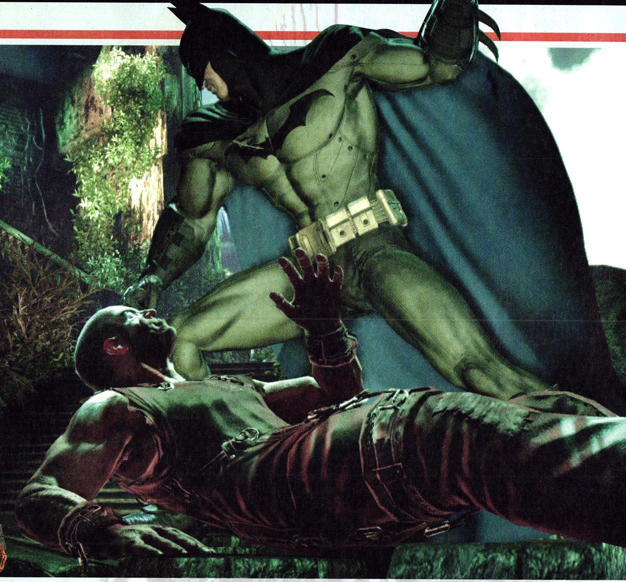
While Roger's been all around this great big world, and he wishes they all could be California Girls, he thinks he'd settle down in Munich, Germany. Home to BMWs, the Deutches Museum of Technology, and the Oktoberfest, it's a fetching amalgamation of cars, culture, and...well, beer. And if you can't be proud of defending beer, what's left that's really worth fighting for?

NOW PLAYING: *IL-2 Sturmovik, Dirt 2, Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*

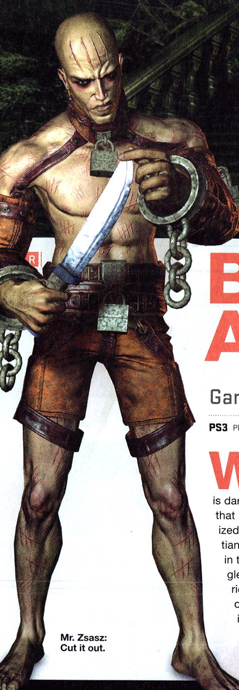
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Basing his choice almost entirely on convenience, Scott picks San Francisco as his home city. For one, he wouldn't have to move since he already lives there, and it's a very compact city, like New York. Can you imagine trying to cover Los Angeles? Way too spread out! Plus, as a superhero, he totally would have caught the guys who stole his car a few months ago... though they were nice enough to return it intact.

NOW PLAYING: *Borderlands, Marvel vs. Capcom 2,* every music game ever



PlayStation The Official Magazine
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Editors' Choice



Mr. Zsasz: Cut it out.

Batman: Arkham Asylum

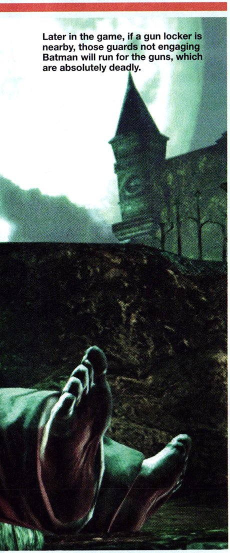
Gamers take over this Asylum

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Eidos/Warner Bros. Int. Ent. DEVELOPER: Rocksteady Games

Wow, that Batman fella is a badass, and the world he inhabits (and protects) is dark and dangerous. You'll know that if you've read any of the stylized graphic novels or seen Christian Bale's brooding interpretation in the recent movies. You'll have gleaned it from the animated series, and the entire back catalog of comic books, but to *feel* it in your hands? That's what Rocksteady Games delivers, in powerful, punchy, and ultimately glorious style. Yes, this is the *Batman* game you've been waiting for.

As the Batmobile roars through the gates of the famous home for the criminally insane, the façade of Arkham Asylum looms large and imposing. Joker is secured in the back seat, hinged on the edge of madness, chit-chatting in his inimitable style, voiced with a brilliant voracity by Mark Hamill. Longtime *Batman* voice actor Kevin Conroy aptly rebukes each conniving comment, and as the camera pans back from this cinematic opening, it reveals the multiple buildings across Arkham Island that constitute the complete facility.

Predictably Joker turns the tables on his incarceration, and with the help of Harley Quinn takes control of the penitentiary, leaving Batman as the sole savior of Warden Sharp, Commissioner Gordon, and the remaining Asylum guard corps. After this several minute interactive cutscene you face a handful of released goons, jumping instantly into the beat-'em-up mechanic that forms the meat of *Batman's* combat tactics.


Later in the game, if a gun locker is nearby, those guards not engaging Batman will run for the guns, which are absolutely deadly.

Just a tip, the graveyard outside the botanical gardens, houses a few Riddler secrets.

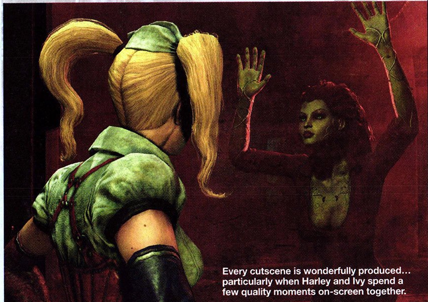
Be a better Batman

One flurry of fists and feet later and three unconscious inmates would attest—if they could speak—to the power and lightning quick moves unleashed by the caped crusader. But to be fair, they ain't seen nothin' yet. With every goon takedown, every uncovered secret, every pair of chattering comedy teeth smashed by a batarang throw, you earn "experience" that eventually allows you to unlock one of 20 upgrades. A number of these upgrades include special moves that perform instant takedowns after you've built up your combo multiplier. So later in the game, when you're facing packs of eight or more, some wielding knives, others with electrified stun batons, you'll hand out even more devastating beatings.

Other upgrades include better armor protection (you'll need it), and enhancements to some of the cool gadgets you'll pick up along the way (see "Those wonderful toys" sidebar).

Every piece opens up new opportunities for exploration across the island. Really, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is almost as much about discovery as it is beating up a veritable who's who of DC Comics' villains. Utilizing the detective skills is absolutely critical to solving the subtle and varied puzzles and curveballs thrown by Joker. Hit L2 and you switch into Batman's Detective mode, which provides a cool visual overlay effect that allows you to see goons through walls (and highlights them in red if they're armed with guns, rather than the easier, blue-outlined bat-, knife-, and fist-wielders), spot weakened walls that can be blasted (if you can reach them), and highlight power utility boxes that you'll eventually be able to hack.

It's easy to play much of the game in this visual mode since a) it looks cool, and b) it provides so much contextual information about your surroundings and threats. Even while fighting, it never gets old seeing the final, slow-mo takedown of an →


Every cutscene is wonderfully produced… particularly when Harley and Ivy spend a few quality moments on-screen together.

Those wonderful toys

You might wish he had them all at the start, but you'll be thankful for all come the end—just some of the cool gear Batman uses around Arkham Asylum.

GRAPNEL GUN Swinging like a spider can, this is the basic method of reaching high places. Look for the circular icon with R1 in it to know you can shoot out the grapnel and reach that point.

BATARANG The single batarang is fired quickly using L1 (you'll need it against the bigger Titan henchmen), but you can upgrade to a double, triple, and remote-controlled batarang.

BATCLAW Stick this into an object (or target) and whale on the X button to pull it towards you (handy for pulling enemies in range into pits or off ledges, if used right). You'll need to upgrade to the Ultra Batclaw to pull down those weakened walls you can't reach to spray with detonating gel.

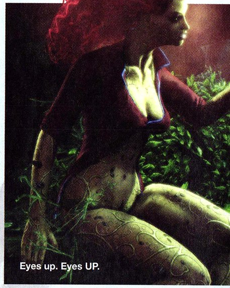
CRYPTOGRAPHIC POWER AMPLIFIER Required to hack the seemingly impassible security gates, it can be upgraded to require less finesse. This is one of the most inventive and fundamentally coolest uses of rumble effects we've ever seen on PS3. Move both analog sticks to find the point of maximum rumble (and the device screen turns green) to overload the power.

enemy in glorious x-ray vision, the jaw line perfectly outlined as Batman's boot or fist issues lights out. Stay in it too long, however, and you'll miss some of the island's impressive visual transformation.

A titanic confrontation

When Joker and the inmates take over the Asylum, it's obvious Batman has to intervene, but what starts as a simple restoration of order turns into an ominous threat to all of Gotham. Research by one naïve Dr. Young on the island—a puppet in Joker's scheme—has created Titan, a drug similar to the one that infuses Bane's hulking frame. Injecting it in a thousand Asylum goons would create an unstoppable army that would devastate Gotham. Batman needs to find an antidote and to stop Joker, and that involves exploring the island, receiving intel from Gordon's daughter, Oracle, and visiting so many of Joker's villainous friends.

The game almost plays out with open-world freedom. While you're perpetually pushed down a path decreed by duty and mission objectives, you have quite a bit of flexibility as you move from the penitentiary to the various wings of the Asylum, to Arkham Mansion and the botanical gardens. Here, the developers have tapped into a vast swathe of the Batman lore, even so far as recreating some locations made famous in the panels of the *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* graphic novel.



Eyes up. Eyes UP.

As you seek out any of The Riddler's 240 hidden puzzles (he's conveniently left maps to find that provide directions to them) or interview tapes conducted with the most famous inmates (that provide some clues and explanation of what's going on, if you care to listen) you'll backtrack across the map's surface buildings and underground areas. If it sounds repetitious, it isn't, largely because Poison Ivy plays a much more significant role than the pre-release footage might suggest. Her impact on the island's plant life evolves each location's look and flow. You'll have to find new routes through old paths, which in turn uncover more secrets and solutions to Riddler's perpetual puzzles.

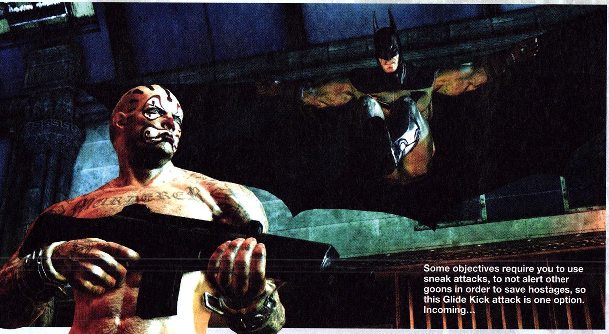
Arkham Island travelogue

Navigating the open, island surface environment is consistently fresh as the story throws new challenges at seemingly every turn, all perfectly in tune with the ongoing plot, and never feeling forced. Using the grapnel to zipline up to roofs or platforms is absolutely vital to the exploration aspects of the game, and while swinging from gargoyle statue to statue on indoor areas makes this bat's nimbleness evoke that of a certain arachnid-powered superhero, it makes for fast-paced, fluid combat situations. Between the detective mode, map function, and perfectly effective introduction of new devices, it's hard to get lost. Sure, the ability to tune Detective mode to follow fingerprints, DNA profile, or the aroma of quarries you need to track feels a little hokey, but it ensures that you're hardly ever frustrated.

Take the challenge

Some of The Riddler's puzzles unlock additional Challenge modes, adding up to a total suite of 16 arenas, eight of which—exclusively on PS3—you can play as The Joker. Complete the single-player game to unlock an armored Batman model to take into these challenges. Each event tests a variety of Batman's skills, mixing straight pugilistic action to scenarios requiring precision use of the detective mode. If you find yourself getting overwhelmed in some of the bigger fights with goons in the single-player game, spending a few rounds practicing these challenges can help hone your buttonmashing skills to better string combos together. Fighting as Joker is a joy in itself. Generating high combo multipliers is rewarded with more points, but the real payoff is the array of crazy animations as Joker performs finishing moves by jumping on a guard's chest, then casually boots him in the chin, and so many more. You can track your points, or the time it takes to complete a challenge, on Leaderboards if you're logged in to PSN.

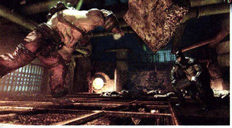
> "Need to take my temperature? I'd be happy to drop my pants." - Joker (not Rob)



Some objectives require you to use sneak attacks, to not alert other goons in order to save hostages, so this Glide Kick attack is one option. Incoming...

Inventive boss battles blend perfectly with the story. Nothing seems forced or anachronistic.

Smile, you're on candid smackdown. A Titan-infused goon takes a moment for the camera!



Bane lobs chunks of rock, so you'll need to double-tap X to evade, then stun him with a batarang before closing to lay the smack down.

Holding R2 while you hit Triangle takes down stunned enemies, but it's tricky in a big fight, with so many other button-presses needed.

That's important given the fact that on the normal (second of three) difficulty levels, some of the bigger fights require careful strategizing to protect your health. You really should know what you're getting into dealing with the likes of Bane and Mr. Zsasz, but credit to the developers for making the challenges against Harley Quinn, Killer Croc, Poison Ivy, and others so original and inventive. I'm being purposely vague because it's also a great testament to the story crafted by DC writer Paul Dini that spoilers truly would diminish moments that throw you completely off-balance, that cause head-scratching, that change your perspective entirely. You'll thank me, honest. (But to give a taste, when you jump on the back of a Titan henchman and use its flailing, battering arms to amass a huge combo multiplier, swatting regular enemies like flies, you'll appreciate the thought put into every encounter).

Most of the game's faults, for what they are, are real nit-picks. The control scheme that packs in so much functionality might take a couple of the game's 12-or-so hours of single-player playthrough time to become truly familiar. While combat can be artfully controlled punches, kicks, and counterattacks, it can also devolve into manic buttonmashing to much the same effect.

But you appreciate the design skill of making locations feel fresh even when you've been there a couple times. The voice work really helps bring the world to life. You're never forced into rote repetition—even when you have to turn on three pumps, after doing the first, the second two don't follow the same pattern. Boss battles are challenging, but they make sense. The secrets not revealed here are worth seeing and experiencing. And once you've finished the single-player campaign, you can go back for the missing secrets to unlock more challenges.

It's a wonderful experience, beginning to end, never taking the easy or familiar route, and infusing each shift of the story with original ideas that cut no corners. By the end, you know that Batman is a badass because you've felt it through every DualShock rumble. And if you're a true fan of the DC universe, you'll keep going back for more. Rob Smith

★★★★★

Contest Winners!

Back in the June issue we offered the chance to win one of FIVE copies of the *Batman: Arkham Asylum* Collector's Edition. The game was subsequently delayed, as so was our announcement of the winners… but the wait was worth it for these five oh-so-lucky winners from our most popular contest ever.

JASON HICKEY
Union, NJ

AY FOUST
Barron WI

KYLENE BEATTIE
Torrance, CA

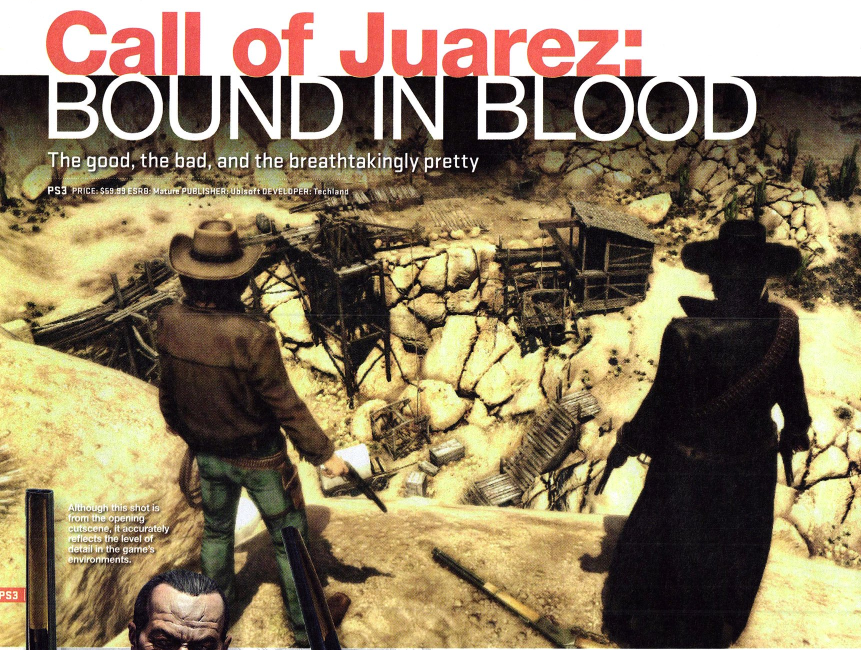
KEVIN E. YOUNG
Charleston, WV

MICHAEL CORBISIERO
Port Saint Lucie, FL

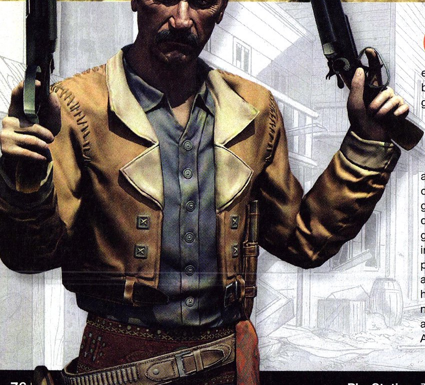
Call of Juarez: BOUND IN BLOOD

The good, the bad, and the breathtakingly pretty

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Techland



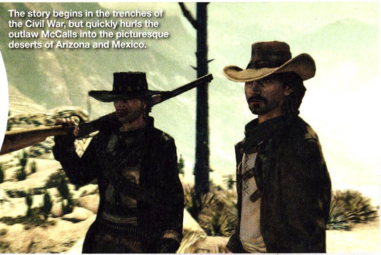
Although this shot is from the opening cutscene, it accurately reflects the level of detail in the game's environments.



Good Western games are hard to find, but *Bound in Blood* just made it a little easier. Set in 1864—two decades before the first *Call of Juarez* game—*Bound* follows a pair of outlaw brothers, Ray and Thomas McCall, as they fight through the final days of the Civil War and venture into the untamed lands along the Mexican border. More of a straightforward FPS than its genre-confused Xbox 360 predecessor, *Bound* takes its cues from games like *Call of Duty,* hurling you into cool action set-pieces and pitched gunfights against Confederate renegades, Union soldiers, two hostile Native American tribes, and no shortage of murderous outlaws, all in the name of finding a legendary Aztec treasure.

But it's a much more involved experience than simple run-and-gun. At the beginning of each chapter, you choose which McCall brother you want to control, which in turn affects your abilities and the path you take through each chapter. Tough-as-nails Ray can take more damage, dual-wield pistols, kick down doors, hurl dynamite, and carry a few (but not all) mounted Gatling guns. Thomas is a better shot with rifles, kills silently with a bow or throwing knives, and can climb low obstacles or use a lasso to pull himself over higher ones.

Either way, you have to keep the brothers well-armed. Although your guns don't break from use like they did in the first game, there are always better shooting irons waiting to be bought from traders or picked from the recently deceased—and



The story begins in the trenches of the Civil War, but quickly hurls the outlaw McCalls into the picturesque deserts of Arizona and Mexico.

with limited cash and inventory slots, you need to be picky. Some are powerful, others reload quickly, and a few are flat-out useless (the Ladies' Gun!) but they're authentic (or at least believable) to the period. All of them can be fired from horseback, too, which is great because you spend big chunks of the game galloping around on equines.

Cover also plays a part in using guns effectively, and *Bound* takes an interesting approach, enabling you to stick to cover points automatically just by walking up to them. It works surprisingly well, and smoothly enough that it never gets in the way during gameplay.

Sometimes the brothers split up—in one sequence, Ray has to distract a team of snipers while Thomas sneaks around behind them, climbs up a building, and blows them away at close range—but normally, they work as a team, trading banter as they clear rooms in coordinated slow-motion sequences. Your brother usually does a good job of taking care of himself (mainly because he's invulnerable unless you wander off without him), but this key partnership reveals the glaring, disappointing omission of a mode to play through with a *real* buddy.

Then again, co-op might interfere with the many slow-motion set pieces. Central to staying alive is the game's "Concentration Mode," which becomes available when you've killed a handful of enemies in quick succession. Activate it and time slows, enabling Ray to target and execute multiple enemies at once or Thomas to gun down everyone onscreen by fanning the hammer of his revolver. Either way, the end result is enemies die…fast.

Co-op also wouldn't jibe with the game's boss-battle showdowns, in which you face down a single opponent and draw your gun at the exact second a bell rings. While they look awesome, they're excruciating to play because there's no clear way to guess when the bell will ring other than carefully timing it out with the music. You'll likely die a few times before finding each fight's sweet spot.

That aside, the action is a lot of fun, and it's presented with beautiful visuals and a compelling story (narrated by a third brother, William, a young preacher who abhors the McCalls' violence but tags along anyway). Throw in a couple of free-roaming levels filled with lucrative side missions, an endlessly replayable, class-based multiplayer mode, and the nonstop satisfaction of blasting outlaws point-blank with a sawed-off shotgun, and *Bound in Blood* is a fun, wildly varied romp through the Wild West. Mikel Reparaz

★★★★

Know your sidearms

Bound in Blood's wide array of period-appropriate pistols varies significantly in range, speed, and power. Knowing eaching gun's attributes can spell the difference between victory and a pine box.

CLASSIC GUN: Basic, garden-variety revolver. Weak, but accurate and quick to reload.

RANGER: Packs more power and accuracy than the Classic, but pauses just a hair longer between shots.

QUICKSHOOTER: As powerful as the Classic, but reloads in a split-second. Not as accurate, though.

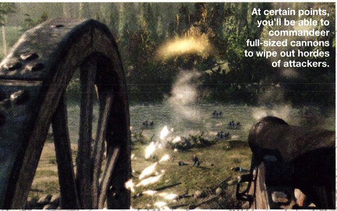
LADIES' GUN: A two-shot Derringer best left on the ground.

HYBRID GUN: Fires a rifle round as its first shot, which is more powerful than the ensuing eight pistol rounds.

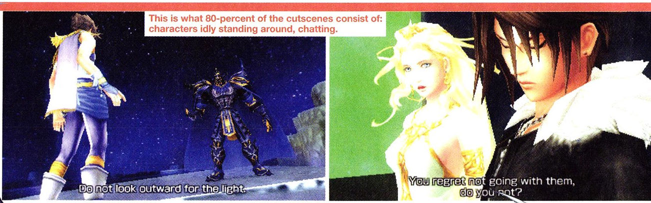
PEPPERGUN: Sports a useless bayonet and no barrel, but packs a punch and fires and reloads quickly.

VOLCANO GUN: The most powerful pistol in the game, it carries 12 shots and is accurate at long range but takes a while to reload.

The McCall brothers aren't *really* bad, they're just good at what they do…killing.



At certain points, you'll be able to commandeer full-sized cannons to wipe out hordes of attackers.


This is what 80-percent of the cutscenes consist of: characters idly standing around, chatting.
Do not look outward for the light.
You regret not going with them, do you not?

Dissidia Final Fantasy

The most complex fighting game you'll ever play

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix

Mystical green light flows up from the depths of a broken planet—two figures leap from shattered rocks, their swords clash in midair, and one of them starts to fall, then rights himself, using a piece of floating rubble as leverage, and somersaults back into the fray.

You've seen this fight before. It's Cloud against Sephiroth. Once more, they're battling at the core of a dying planet. Once more, the Lifestream surrounds them. And once more, you control Cloud—at least, for the moment. But this time, the controls aren't turn-based, the environment is dynamic, and a victory here is just a small piece of a much bigger war. This is *Dissidia Final Fantasy,* an RPG-fighting game that's unlike anything you've seen or played before.

FF Fighter

Ostensibly, *Dissidia* is a weapon- and spell-based fighting game: you control a single character at a time and fight a single opponent, using a combination of ranged and melee attacks to whittle away your opponent's life as you battle on the ground or in the air. (It's much more complicated than that sounds. See the Crazy Battles boxout for details.) But this is also an RPG—which means your characters level up, gain new skills, and constantly upgrade their gear. Think of *Dissidia* as an action-RPG expressed through fighting game mechanics.

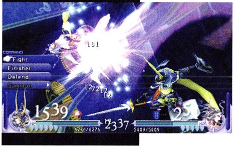
Let me give you a taste of how complex *Dissidia* is: there are over 20 playable characters, each with their own unique sets of moves. Now, these moves are *customizable*. As you gain experience by attacking enemies, your characters level up and earn new attacks and spells. You can only hotkey a finite number of them (around six), so the trick is to pick the ones that suit your style of play and master them so that you can battle steadily tougher and smarter enemies.

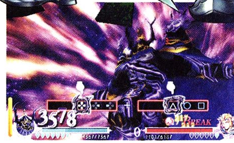
You also obtain new gear as you level up—either by opening treasure chests on the grid-like boards that serve as the game's world map or by creating them yourself through the game's crafting system. After that, you set up your character's accessories and summons, and you're ready for battle. ➔

PSP | R

Not a Fighter? It's okay!

Too hard for you to plan your dodges and block in perfect time to activate a counterattack? The developers guessed that some of the people picking up *Dissidia* are RPG nuts who've never played a fighting game, so they included a Command-style option of battling. Instead of memorizing moves and practicing your timing, you can pick from a menu of options that pop up on the battlefield, like Fight or Defend. The game will then pick the appropriate attack and execute it for you. It's clumsy at first, but it's almost like playing a turn-based fighting game.





An Ex Burst occurs when you execute an HP Attack during Ex Mode. When this happens, each character performs a different special attack that plays out as a mini-game. The Onion Knight *(FFIII)* Ex Burst gives you a limited amount of time to search for a specific spell on a menu of spells while the Warrior of Light *(FFI)* Burst requires that you tap on the D-pad buttons displayed.

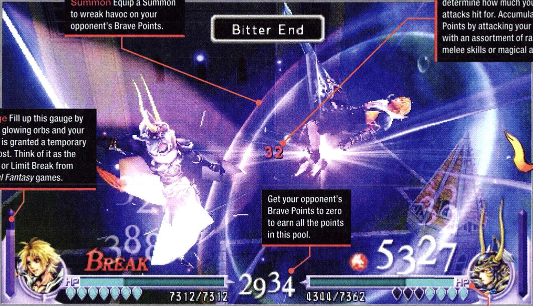
Play Online

Battle friends who also own *Dissidia* via the game's ad hoc system—or trade Friend Cards and battle "ghosts" of those characters anytime. You earn rewards for collecting cards and battling ghosts, so the next time you attend an anime convention, turn your PSP to *Dissidia's* friend card trading mode to effortlessly collect more cards.

"HE HACKED INTO OUR NETWORK, STOLE OUR PLANS, AND KILLED NEARLY ALL OF MY MEN."
ALPHA™
PROTOCOL
THE ESPIONAGE RPG

Crazy Battles (but it works)

The battle system in *Dissidia* can't be explained; it can only be experienced. *Dissidia's* combat mechanics make little sense on paper—just take a look below for proof!—but trust me, it all comes together when you dive into the action.



Summon Equip a Summon to wreak havoc on your opponent's Brave Points.

Brave Points These points determine how much your HP attacks hit for. Accumulate Brave Points by attacking your enemy with an assortment of ranged and melee skills or magical attacks.

Ex Gauge Fill up this gauge by collecting glowing orbs and your character is granted a temporary power boost. Think of it as the Overdrive or Limit Break from other *Final Fantasy* games.

Get your opponent's Brave Points to zero to earn all the points in this pool.

Health Bar The goal, like in any fighting game, is to empty your opponent's HP bar. However, the items your opponent has equipped (a Phoenix Down accessory, for example, which grants an extra life) make it a lot less straightforward.

See? It's complex! But what all these different subtleties actually mean is that any fight can be won with a bit of luck, a ton of strategizing, and picking "Retry" enough times on the "Defeated" screen!

Keepin' the Fantasy

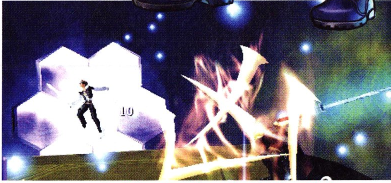
Okay, those are the facts, but you're wondering how the game *feels* and whether long-time *Final Fantasy* fans will find it satisfying. First the bad news: the story is beyond cryptic. If you play through all the single-player missions, you eventually piece the story together, but even so, you can't *really* justify stuffing characters from the different *Final Fantasy* games into a single plot. And you'll roll your eyes at how emo the characters are.

Realize that fact, accept it, and then move on, because it doesn't matter. The minute you boot up the story campaign of your favorite *Final Fantasy* and hear the familiar music playing, you'll close your eyes and sigh. This is pure fan service and it more than does the job. You'll forgive the occasionally frustrating gameplay—this is a game that's meant to be played a bit at a time, day after day—and you'll pat the nonsensical story on its metaphorical back for at least trying. Why? Because you can finally battle Ultimecia as Terra (woo, girl fight!) or Cloud as Kefka, with the music theme from your favorite *FF* playing in the background. You can level up Sephiroth to your heart's content, unlocking powerful abilities that you've always wanted to try.

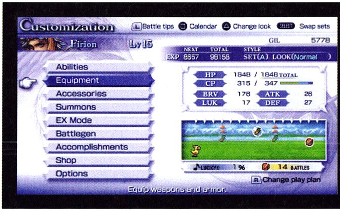
Dissidia's a bit too complex to please conventional fighting fans, but the game more than pays off for anyone who enjoys character progression—including anyone who's obsessed with *Final Fantasy*.

Teresa Dun

★★★★



The camera can occasionally be an issue when walls and platforms block the view of your character or your opponent. At times, it makes hiding from attacks more difficult.



Firion Lv 15
GIL 5778
EXP NEXT 8657 TOTAL 98158
STYLE SET(A) LOOK(Normal)
HP 1848 / 1848 TOTAL
CP 315 / 347
BRV 176
ATK 26
LUK 17
DEF 27
LUCKY!! 1 %
14 BATTLES
Equip weapons and armor.

Dissidia will grab you...and never let go

A little Chocobo grants you items for battling a certain number of times per day. Moogles grant you bonuses for coming back and playing every day of the week. An Accomplishment system grants you gear for achieving certain goals, like participating in 300 battles or unlocking characters. With so many rewards, you'll never want to miss a day. Sly, clever developers.

"HE WENT INSIDE UNDETECTED, RESCUED ME, AND THEN HE WAS GONE."

ALPHA PROTOCOL™
THE ESPIONAGE RPG

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey

Wounded Warbird

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: 505 Games/ 1C Company DEVELOPER: Gaijin Entertainment

World War II. Now that was a real war with *real* air combat. No shooting gazillion dollar self-guided missiles at blips on a radar screen. WWII was the last time that epic, aerial showdowns occurred with the combatants flying within figurative spitting distance of each other armed with nothing more than guns, skill, and guts. It's an ambience and experience that the *IL-2 Sturmovik* PC games captured to near perfection in the original from 2001, its sequels, and expansion packs.

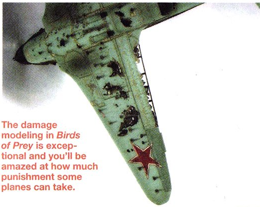
While *Birds of Prey* sports a decidedly console-friendly arcade-like flavor, you can't help but be impressed by the scenarios in the game. Slashing through swathes of Heinkel HE-111 bombers in your Spitfire during the Battle of Britain is simply awe-inspiring with 50-plus (a conservative estimate) planes in the sky simultaneously. In another mission, providing ground support during the Battle of Stalingrad provides even more surface targets to attack than the huge fracas occurring in the air. Playing the scenarios in Arcade mode means you never run out of fuel, ammo, bombs, or missiles, and enemies take fewer hits to destroy. But regardless of the play setting, the flight mechanics are spot on with the one major control omission being the lack of direct access to 12 o'clock high and six o'clock camera views—perspectives considered essential in hardcore PC flight-sims, but only moderately missed here.

But nothing compares to testing your air combat mettle against real-life opponents, and it's online where *Birds of Prey* really takes off. Standard head-to-head confrontations for up to 16 players abound in Dogfight and Team Battle modes, while more cooperation and coordination is required for Capture Airfields (land to capture, but take-off before you're strafed) and Strike (Teams protect their own ground targets while initiating attacks into enemy territory).

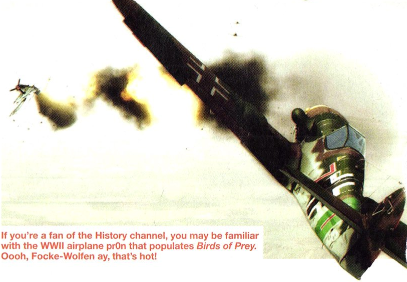
While *Birds of Prey* offers an engaging air combat experience, there is a technical issue. During instances when numerous planes populate the screen or when executing a tight, banking turn, a slight visual stutter can occur as a target plane enters your field of view. Considering the game's otherwise beautiful graphics, I wish it were a forgivable lapse, but there are instances when the stutter disrupts your timing just as an enemy is being lined up for the kill. But perhaps it speaks volumes that even with this snafu, *IL-2* is still my bird of choice for a PS3 flight-sim.

Roger Burchill

★★★½

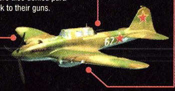


The damage modeling in *Birds of Prey* is exceptional and you'll be amazed at how much punishment some planes can take.



If you're a fan of the History channel, you may be familiar with the WWII airplane pr0n that populates *Birds of Prey*. Oooh, Focke-Wolfen ay, that's hot!

THE FLYING TANK

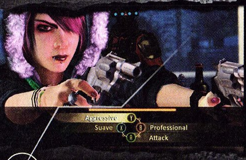


Life Sentence The Russians allegedly used prisoners to man the IL-2's rear guns with the promise of release for valiant performance. The position had virtually no protective armor and Gunners were also denied parachutes to encourage them to stick to their guns.

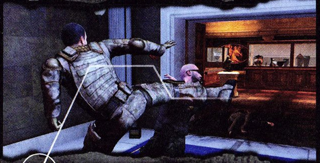
Marketing Legacy Though it's called *IL-2 Sturmovik*—a Russian Ground Attack plane renowned for its toughness—only a few of the missions in *Birds of Prey* involve piloting the craft.

Airborne Armor The IL-2 was so heavily armored that German pilots reported that their bullets merely bounced off the plane. The more lightly armored underbelly was the plane's vulnerable spot.

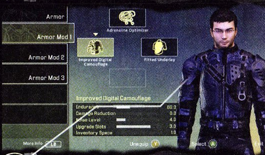
"EVERY EVENT STARTED WITH *THEIR* CHOICES. THEY ENDED WITH MINE."


Aggressive
Suave
Professional
Attack

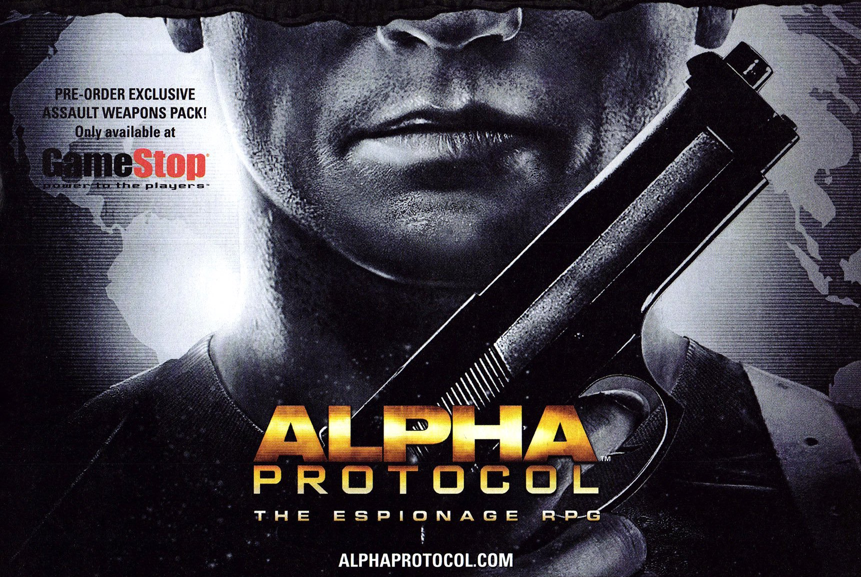
DECIDE HOW THE STORY PLAYS OUT BASED ON THE CHOICES THAT YOU MAKE.



EMPLOY METHODS OF STEALTH, TRICKERY, HUMOR, TECHNICAL APTITUDE, SABOTAGE, FIREPOWER, AND MANY MORE.


Armor
Armor Mod 1
Armor Mod 2
Armor Mod 3
Adrenaline Optimizer
Improved Digital Camouflage
Fitted Underlay
Improved Digital Camouflage
Endurance 80.0
Damage Reduction 0.0
Noise Level 4.0
Upgrade Slots 3.0
Inventory Space 1.0
More Info
Unequip
Select

COMMAND SKILLS LIKE CLOSE-COMBAT TECHNIQUES, LETHAL WEAPONS MASTERY, & THE USE OF INGENIOUS SPY GADGETS.



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Steambot Chronicles Battle Tournament

Even mech champs start out as robot paperboys

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Irem

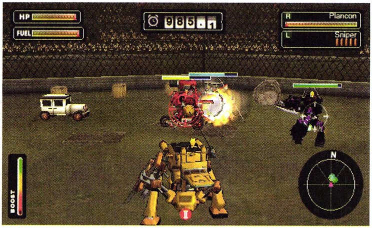
The obvious title indicates a tournament battle game, right? Not even close. You battle badass mechs (called Trotmobiles) in cage matches for all of, oh, 15 minutes of an eight to 10 hour game, and the rest of your time is spent running errands for townspeople. Now, jobs that earn you fame and cash so you can upgrade your Trotmobile aren't necessarily bad, but when déjà vu strikes during almost every quest, you start to think this open world gameplay is little more than an excuse to drag out the game's length. Six of my first seven quests, for example, sent me down the exact same forest path to pick up or deliver an item.

Like the previous *Steambot Chronicles,* you're given plenty of colorful dialogue options (you can wake up shouting "No…not the tentacles!"), but choices sadly have no lasting impact on the characters or plot. That's too bad since the characters are quite quirky. Memorable, even.

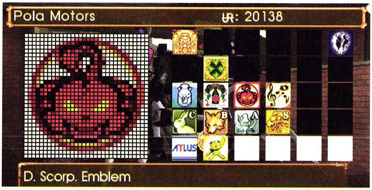
Trotmobiles are extremely customizable and the diverse weapon attachments you can apply each play differently, allowing for some fun experimentation in combat. But it's too easy to beat enemies, even in the tournament, by simply running forward and punching repeatedly.

Josh Augustine

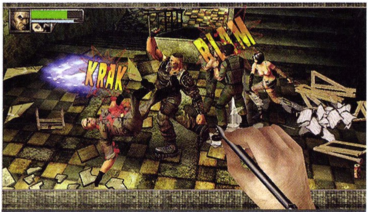
★★★



Up to four players can battle in the arena with a single UMD, but you'll need multiple UMDs to access your customized Trotmobiles.



Emblems for your Trotmobile can be looted or earned through conversations—or just draw your own!



The Maker's hand sometimes deviously covers up part of the screen.

Unbound Saga

An everyday beat-'em-up disguised as a comic

PSP PRICE: $14.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Vogster Entertainment DEVELOPER: Vogster Entertainment

I had the same dream last night: the one with rabbits…and Molotov cocktails." Sounds messy, but the opening lines of *Unbound Saga* establishes the game's tongue-in-cheek tone—a tone that continues as your characters (the muscular Rick and the sprightly Lori) travel between frames of a comic book pursuing their metaphysical enemy, the artist, whose hand draws in all the goons they fight. The combat's enjoyable though brainless, requiring little more than running from one side of the screen to the other, punching wildly. The graphics are the real draw: comic book-style grittiness in all its grim, goofy glory.

The dialogue amuses—hobos hassle you for "Robbie's liver" and mutants shout "All hail Blongg!" and salute before they rush you—but that level of inspiration isn't carried over into the RPG-style upgrade system. You can buff up your stats and purchase combo attacks, but most of those new moves are outperformed by a simple jump kick. The exceptions are a few of Lori's abilities, like teleportation and cloning herself, which help keep combat interesting beyond the first few levels. Likewise, boss fights are mundane affairs with no special mechanics, only larger health pools.

Josh Augustine

★★★½

Alien, hobo, or military, Lori deals with them all the same way—a good ol' fashioned heel to the face.

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Even if the voices are not real... They have pretty good ideas.
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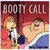

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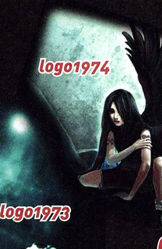
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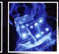
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Good friends don't let you do stupid things... alone
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I am so BROKE ...I can't even pay attention
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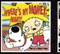
WHERE'S MY MONEY MAN!
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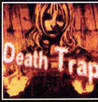
Mystery GIRL
logo1972

Games



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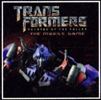
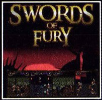

TRANSFORMERS THE MOBILE GAME
game4433

DEVILS AND DEMONS
game4434

SWORDS OF FURY
game4435

Realtones

ASHER ROTH - I LOVE COLLEGE	song5386
BLACK EYED PEAS - BOOM BOOM POW	song5387
BOW WOW - YOU CAN GET IT ALL	song5388
EMINEM - 3AM	song5389
EMINEM - WE MADE YOU	song5390
EMINEM, DR. DRE AND 50 CENT - CRACK A BOTTLE	song5391
JAMIE FOXX - BLAME IT (FT T-PAIN)	song5392
KANYE WEST - HEARTLESS	song5393
KID CUDI - DAY ,N' NITE	song5394
LIL KIM - DOWNLOAD	song5395
NE-YO - MAD	song5396
SLIM THUG - I RUN	song5397
THE FRAY - YOU FOUND ME	song5398
TWISTA - WETTER	song5399
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SUPER MARIO BROS. THEMESONG song5401

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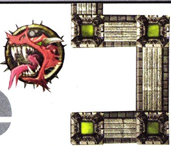
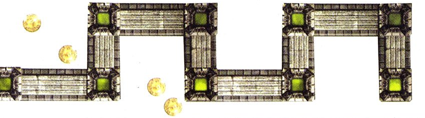
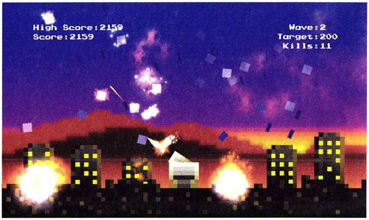


Qore Arcade

FIVE great games for just $2.99

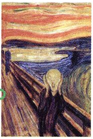
Did you know that bundled in episode 14 of PSN's Qore are five games? It's true. These are serious games. Deep, thought-provoking games. You could even say these are grand masterpieces of art *disguised* as games. (Or you could say they're one-dimensional games bundled for free with other content, but *we* won't.) We dig deep into some of the finest examples of gameplay ever devised.



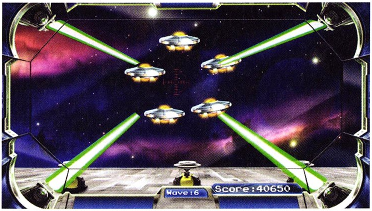

High Score:2159
Score:2159
Wave:2
Target:200
Kills:11

Pixel Reign

Undoubtedly, *Pixel Reign* is an expression of Qore's outrage at what we humans are doing to the environment. Venomous Pixels are "reigning" from the sky (see how that oozes with symbolism—does pollution "reign" over and define us now?) and these Pixels have the power to destroy buildings with a single touch (acid rain, anyone?). As an angry outcry against this terrible phenomenon, you must blast the Pixels away with your turret, which has an endless supply of fiery, gunpowder-laden bullets. Irony, what irony?



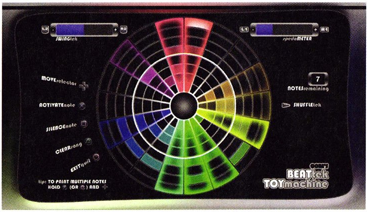
ON THE "GAMES AS ART" SCALE: Edvard Munch's The Scream, evoking the terror of alien invasion


Wave:6
Score:40650

Qore Wars

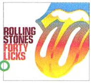
When life presents you with hard decisions, a gamer's got to do what a gamer's got to do—in this case, kill and annihilate. Waves of enemy spacecraft are trying to destroy your home base. For the sake of all that is good in this world, you cannot let that happen. We repeat, you *cannot* let that happen. So you shoot them. In the end, all *our* base are belong to *us,* bastards!

ON THE "GAMES AS ART" SCALE: Kindergarten finger painting.

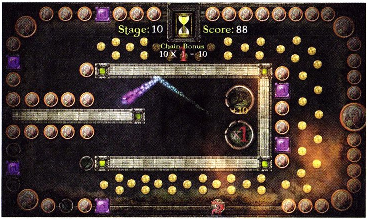

L2
R2
SWINGtek
L1
R1
spedoMETER
MOVEselector
ACTIVATEnote
SILENCEnote
CLEARsong
EXITquit
tip: TO PAINT MULTIPLE NOTES HOLD (OR) AND
7
NOTESremaining
SHUFFLEtek
QORE'S
BEATtek
TOYmachine

Qore's BEATtek TOY machine

Think you've got the funk? Think you've got the guh-roove? Then prove it by creating killer rhythms on *Qore's BEATtek TOYmachine.* (Did you bob your chin when you said that? If not, you better say it again, 'cause you ain't sayin' it right, bro.) If you find the machine a tad difficult to control—it's not the machine, it's you. Step into the BEAT-Aid or keep your mouth shut.


ROLLING
STONES
FORTY
LICKS

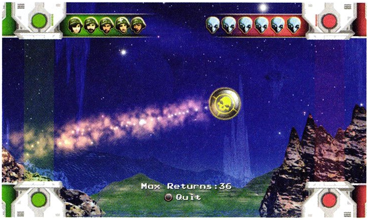
ON THE "GAMES AS ART" SCALE: The Rolling Stones' Forty Licks album cover…funky.



Rune Raider

If this isn't a perfect metaphor for life, we don't know what is. You go through the level (or life), collecting coins (monies or career or love, your choice) and battling monsters (your personal demons)—and when time runs out, it all goes to hell. You think you're in control of the ball, but you're really not. It bounces from circumstance to circumstance as it pleases, even though you *had* a perfectly laid out plan for it. It's just so freakin' frustrating—er, we mean, awesome. The game, not our lives. Yeah. And don't forget to check out the game's introduction video, which is voiced by a very special someone.

ON THE "GAMES AS ART" SCALE: Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling—it doesn't get better than that.

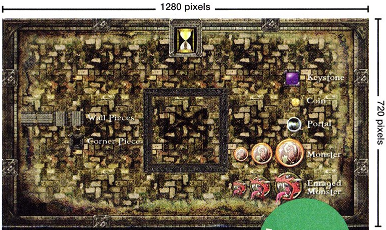


Death Orb 3000: The Final Encounter

Max Returns : 36
Quit

You hold in your hand humanity's last hope: a ray of sizzling laser-tastic holiness that shields the Earth from the menacing, crap-your-pants-inducing *Death Orb.* (Cue ominous music here.) Aliens have invaded, and in an epic struggle to determine humankind's survival, you must use your laser to "fling" the Death Orb towards the aliens as they do the same to you. Horrifying. Electrifying. It's a magnificent battle of right versus wrong, good versus evil, sanity versus chaos. It's *Death Orb 3000: The Final Encounter,* and it even has multiplayer!

ON THE "GAMES AS ART" SCALE: Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans, simple and timeless.



WIN!

Make your own Rune Raider level

Episode 15 of Qore will debut new *Rune Raider* levels, with new features added to the challenge. We're giving you the chance to contribute to the cause and have your level enshrined. Subject to Sony approval, the Qore team has agreed to take one reader design and include it in the next available *Rune Raider* level pack update. Everything you need is above. Using that scale of the arena for reference, sketch out your own level, place walls, coins, and monsters. Visit PTOM's Facebook page at tinyurl.com/PTOMgroup for additional details. Send entries to:

Rune Raider contest
PlayStation: The Official Magazine
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080

Or scan and email them to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com and include *Rune Raider* in the subject line. And don't forget to include your full mailing address. We'll assess which entry will be made into a *Rune Raider* level, and notify the winner in an upcoming issue.

QORE RUNE RAIDER CONTEST RULES

THE CONTEST: Qore is asking individuals to design and submit a level for *Rune Raider.* The winning entry will be part of the next available level pack update. The winner will receive a year subscription to Qore with a retail value of $24.99, and their level will become part of *Rune Raider.*

TO ENTER: No purchase is necessary to win. You must be at least 13 years of age to enter. To enter the Qore *Rune Raider* Contest ("Contest"), you will need to design an original level for Qore's *Rune Raider* game. Designs should be drawn on paper or computer, scanned and emailed to us at PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. Images should be no larger than 2MB each, and in either JPG, PNG, or GIF format.

DEADLINE: Entries into the Contest must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. PST on September 25th, 2009 (the "Deadline"). The winners will be chosen on or about, September 26th, 2009, and will be notified by email (or regular mail). Along with your entry, you'll need to include your name, address, daytime telephone number, and email address (if you have one). You may submit as many original level designs as you wish.

COPYRIGHT: Copyright rules apply. The work must be your own. You cannot enter someone else's design. Modifying, enhancing, or altering someone else's work does not constitute an original, valid contest entry. Entries previously published elsewhere may not be submitted. Entries can include graphics as well as sayings/slogans, but may not contain any intellectual property of any third party such as logos, trademarks, service marks, or copyrighted material. You may not use someone else's copyrighted material without permission. Qore reserves the right to reject any submission that it deems in its sole discretion to be vulgar, profane, offensive, or inappropriate.

PRIZES: The following prizes will be awarded: One year subscription to Qore and the level created for an upcoming *Rune Raider* level pack. The prizes are nontransferable and no substitutions will be allowed.

SELECTION AND NOTIFICATION OF WINNER: The Winner will be chosen by a panel of judges consisting of Qore employees from all Entries received. Judging will be based on (1) technical and artistic merit as well as overall impression or "Wow" factor. The decision of the judges is final and entrants agree to be bound by this decision. The winner will be notified by email and will be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within seven days of receipt; failure to do so upon request will result in forfeiture of the prize. If a selected winner cannot be contacted, is ineligible, fails to claim a prize, an affidavit of eligibility and publicity/liability release is not timely received or is incomplete or modified, the prize may be forfeited and an alternate winner selected from remaining Entries timely submitted. Winners are responsible for paying any income taxes on the value of the prize received.

If a winner is a minor, the prize will be awarded in the name of winner's parent or legal guardian, who is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state, and local taxes, and that winner must also provide a signed parental or guardian consent form, provided by the sponsor, within 7 days of notification attempt. Failure of the minor to return the guardian consent form will result in the forfeiture of the prize and selection of an alternate winner, who will be chosen through a random drawing from the remaining eligible entries.

WARRANTY: By submitting any level design (hereinafter collectively referred to as "the Design") for consideration in the Contest, you represent and warrant to Future that you have the right and authority to convey the rights granted hereunder; that the Design is original and free and clear of any encumbrances or liens and is not subject to any third-party agreements or arrangements that would interfere with their use; that the Design does not plagiarize any other third party's intellectual property; and that the exercise of rights granted to Future herein will not infringe upon any copyright, right of privacy or any other rights whatsoever of any third party. You shall hold Future harmless and shall indemnify Future for all costs and expenses (including reasonable attorney fee's) in the event of a breach of any of the foregoing warranties or representations. These warranties and representations do not extend to any material not furnished by you.

GRANT OF LICENSE: By accepting the prize, the winner agrees to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law and further agrees to grant to Future US, Inc. and its affiliate companies a worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive, perpetual (for the duration of the applicable copyright) license to copy, distribute copies of, display, prepare derivative works, and incorporate the Design into the *Rune Raider* Game and other works in any and all media and formats whether now known or hereafter devised. The above rights include the right to make such modifications as are technically necessary to exercise the rights in other media and formats.

RELEASE: By entering the Contest, you (and, if you are a minor, your parents or legal guardians) release Future US and any of their respective parent companies, subsidiaries, affiliates, directors, officers, employees, and agencies (collectively, the "Released Parties") from any liability whatsoever, and waive any and all causes of action, related to any claims, costs, injuries, losses, or damages of any kind arising out of or in connection with the Contest or delivery, misdelivery, acceptance, possession, use of or inability to use any prize (including, without limitation, claims, costs, injuries, losses, and damages related to personal injuries, death, damage to, or destruction of property, rights of publicity or privacy, defamation or portrayal in a false light, whether intentional or unintentional), whether under a theory of contract, tort (including negligence), warranty or other theory.

This Contest is open to residents of the United States only (excluding Puerto Rico). Void where prohibited by law.

Employees, officers, and directors of Future US, Inc., the publisher of their subsidiaries and affiliated companies, and their immediate families and those living in their households, are not eligible.

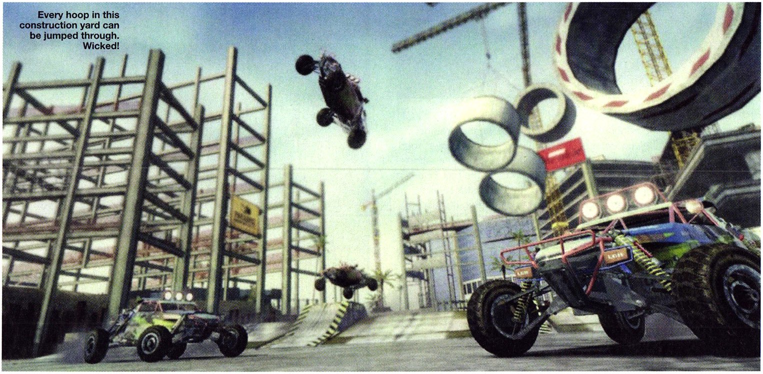
The sponsor of the Contest is Future US, Inc. ("Future US"), 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080). Future US, Inc. cannot be responsible for lost, late, misdirected, or incomplete entries, nor shall it be liable for unsuccessful efforts to notify a winner.

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for the round-trip toll across a bridge (these days). We say yea or nay

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

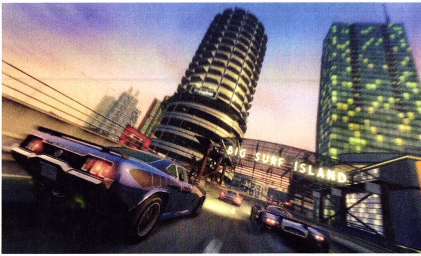
– **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.



Every hoop in this construction yard can be jumped through. Wicked!

Burnout Paradise: Big Surf Island add-on

PRICE: $12.99
DEVELOPER: CRITERION GAMES



If you select the correct car you can drift to the top of that tower to the left. But the real question is: How will you choose to come down?

+ Really like jumps and shortcuts? Always challenging the environment to squeeze out a new stunt? Then this is your element. Armed with the virtually indestructible and super speedy Carson Dust Storm buggy from the get go, *Big Surf* is crammed with more jumps, stunts, hidden areas, billboards to collect and tunnels to explore than the most trick-jammed corner of Paradise City. In fact, the very moment the game kicks off and you drive across Paradise Keys bridge (the umbilical chord that connects BSI to Paradise City), you see a massive triple jump high in its superstructure. Your first thoughts will be: "I've gotta try that!" You will, and you'll be whooping like a beered-up trucker at the rodeo when you nail it.

Big Surf action is split into five preposterously jam-packed regions—Paradise Keys, North Beach, Midtown, South Coast, and Perren's Point. If you don't fancy sticking to the ATV buggy there are nine island cars to find (including the Hunter Olympus Governor—tricked out with a stunt-boost system), 15 events (including all new Island tours) to own, a slew of roads to rule, 15 mega jumps, and 45 billboards to nail plus 10 new freeburn challenges. That'll keep you busy.

Aerial shortcuts

Checkpoint races give you plenty opportunity to go off the main paths to try aerial shortcuts, while it'll take a Herculean effort not to detour and smash through each new billboard you pass en route to the finish line. You can't hang a right without spying a shortcut begging to be tried out or a ramp ready to be exploited for more mid-air madness. My preferred warm-up routine is to head straight to the construction yard and see how many hoops I can jump in five minutes.

The best *Paradise* DLC yet? Pretty much. *BSI* unleashes a concentrated *Burnout* hit with more of the "stunt and explore" stuff you know and love from the Airfield, Quarry, and Beach regions of Paradise City in a tricked-out sandbox the size of Downtown. You'll still want to bash DJ Atomica about the head with his 'board, but you can't have everything.

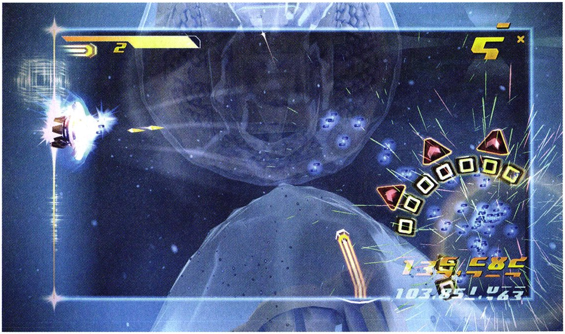
Big Surf ticks all the right boxes and pushes your *Burnout* buttons longer and harder with a ton of jaw-dropping stuntage and challenges over a fresh-feeling yet familiar selection of tracks, with subtle surround effects and Adam & The Ants' "Stand And Deliver" on the soundtrack. Your money or your life? Both surely.

Iain White

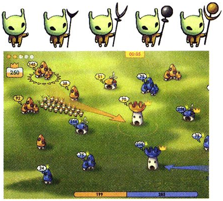
Shatter

PRICE: $7.99
DEVELOPER: SIDHE INTERACTIVE

+ A few key twists distinguish *Shatter* from your typical brick breaker game. You still control a paddle and the goal is to still destroy all the bricks on the screen, but instead of idly praying for the ball, paddle, and bricks to magically align, your paddle can "suck" or "blow" the air around it, thereby manipulating the ball through wind currents. The bricks themselves are also more sophisticated, with some that act as anchors or hinges and others that dangle off of them. There are bosses at the end of each of the 10 levels, adding another layer of depth, and a fantastic soundtrack makes this a title to relax to. Or you can toss out multiple balls into the field for a more chaotic experience. Either way, the gameplay twists make this a worthy investment. Teresa Dun



When your ball hits one of those red blocks, they'll "blast" toward the direction they're facing, like a rocket. Collect the fragments the blocks leave behind to increase your points multiplier.



Mushroom Wars

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** CREAT STUDIOS

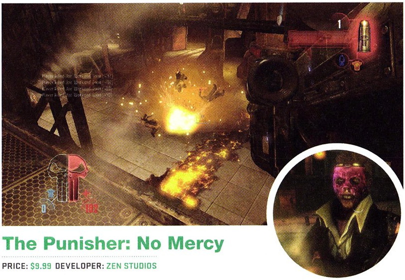
− This game should've been named Mushroom Impasse because it takes forever to win. The concept is too simple: build troops in one building, send troops to an enemy building, and whoever has the larger number of troops wins that building. Hardly exciting. Still, simple concepts *can* work, but with only three types of buildings and one type of soldier, this game just isn't compelling. You could try it for the multiplayer, but fair warning: your opponent and you could simply end up swapping buildings for hours. Teresa Dun

PLAYSTATION STORE

Love is a *Battlefield*...demo.

Summer's just about over. You're sick of the sun. You've spent your cash. What's a gamer to do? In case you missed them, check out these free demos on the PlayStation Store. We promise you'll find something you like.

- → ***Battlefield 1943* demo**
- → ***Fight Night Round 4* demo**
- → ***FUEL* demo**
- → ***InFamous* demo**

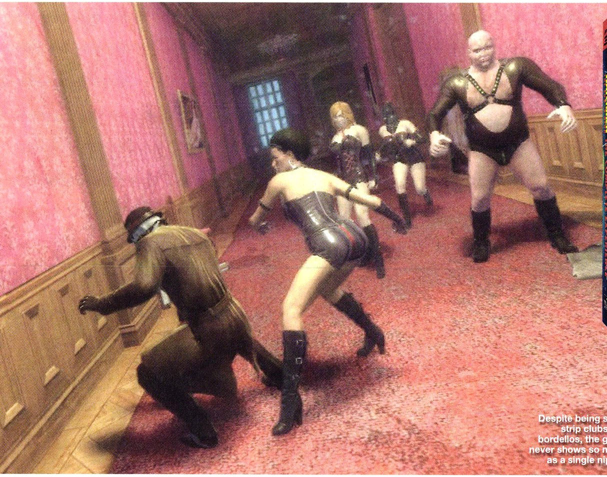


The Punisher: No Mercy

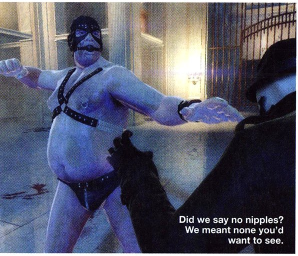
PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** ZEN STUDIOS

− In the case of *The Punisher: No Mercy,* you get what you pay for—in terms of both quality and quantity. This Mature-rated first-person shooter boasts adequate graphics, but the gameplay's about as mediocre as it gets. It's predominately a multiplayer game, so the single-player and co-op "campaigns" are little more than playing on multiplayer maps against bots, and they're both ridiculously short and simple. For 10 bucks, the online multiplayer is decent, at best—we recommend you shell out the few extra bucks for *Battlefield 1943* instead. Teresa Dun

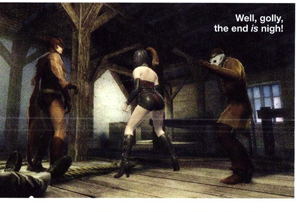
PSN Reviews



Despite being set in strip clubs and bordellos, the game never shows so much as a single nipple.



Did we say no nipples? We meant none you'd want to see.



Well, golly, the end *is* nigh!

Watchmen: The End is Nigh Part 2

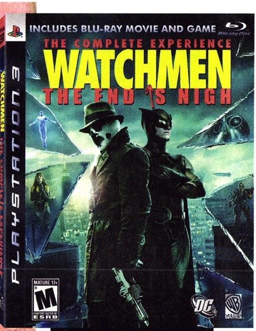
PRICE: $14.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Warner Bros. Int. Ent
DEVELOPER: Deadline Games

− "Repetitive" is a word that gets tossed around a lot when it comes to beat-'em-ups, but in the case of *The End is Nigh Part 2,* it's especially apt. Casting players as either the graceful Nite Owl or brutal Rorschach (or both, with co-op) in a buttonmashy prequel to the graphic novel/film, it offers a lot of simple, violent fun for about the first hour. Then it drags on for two or three more, and pretty soon you just want it to end.

To its credit, *Part 2* is awfully pretty—even more so than the critically panned *Part 1*—but scratch the surface and it's just an endless series of scraps with three interchangeable enemy types: thugs, fat thugs, and female thugs in S&M gear (which is a lot less titillating than it sounds). There's very little strategy involved in fighting enemies; aside from counterattacks, throws, and Rorschach's ability to use weapons, most of the action consists of just whaling on everyone in sight until they fall over. Imagine a *God of War* in which you only ever have a few basic combos and just fight skeleton warriors, and you'll have a good idea of why this is frustrating.

Part 2 is still fun in small doses though, and the $15 price tag makes it slightly more appealing than the $20 *Part 1.* And the suitably edgy, Dave Gibbons-style comic cutscenes are a cool bonus for fans—provided you're a fan who doesn't mind that this grinding brawler doesn't even *begin* to do its source material justice.

Mikel Reparaz



Watchmen: The End is Nigh: The Complete Experience

PRICE: $49.99
RATED: R **ESRB:** Mature

+ On the other hand, getting *The End is Nigh Part 2* in the same $50 package as *Part 1* and the Director's Cut Blu-ray of the *Watchmen* film is a somewhat more attractive prospect. If nothing else, you can think of it as buying the definitive version of the movie with a couple of games thrown in.

The three-hour Director's Cut adds lots of new details and missing backstory, and features "Maximum Movie Mode," a visual commentary that adds onscreen images and cutaways with director Zack Snyder to elaborate on certain scenes. Additionally, the game disc features three short documentaries and a My Chemical Romance video, giving you something to do once you've slogged through both episodes of *The End is Nigh.* You're probably better off just buying the Blu-ray by itself, but if you're hell-bent on playing the games, this is the best way to do it.

What's that smell?
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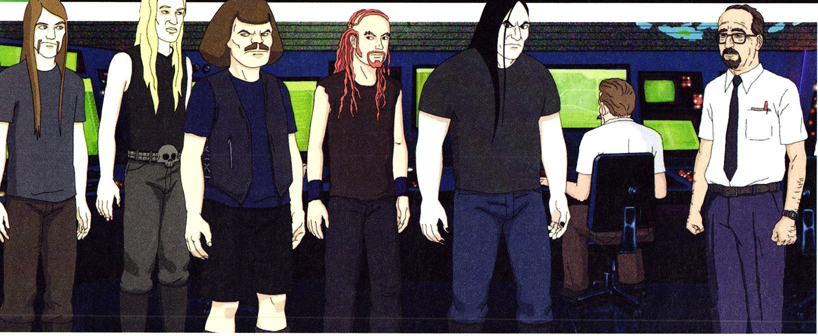
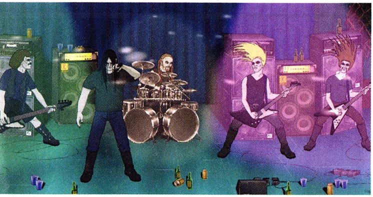


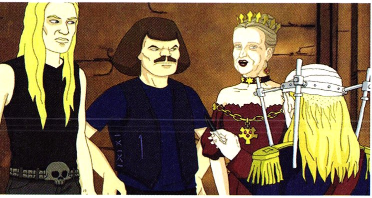
▲ **"It turns out *Metalocalypse*, in addition to being the show I really wanted to do, is really easy to market. People get it immediately: It's a metal band; there's murder."**

Brendon Small: Better than Van Halen!

We talk everything *Metalocalypse* with the series' creator, musical visionary, and voice of Nathan Explosion (among others). Be sure to check out the show on PSN's Video Delivery Service, and keep an eye out for the upcoming third season, second album, and first videogame—all coming this fall!

▼ **"The original idea of the show was to make it 'extreme slapstick.' That was my original term. It's like you're walking around and you die and it's kind of funny."**





PTOM: As the series' creator, are you still the main creative force behind the show?

BRENDON SMALL: Well, the main core of the *Metalocalypse* team is like three or four people just trying to make the show not suck and make sure it doesn't get away from you and stuff. Basically, we're all winging it and doing eight jobs at once; taking on more work than we can handle but getting it done somehow on time; and losing sleep but feeling creatively satisfied. I do all the music, and I'll end up writing scripts or re-writing scripts, but I have a team of some writers this season. Then I have to slip away and shut down production for a month while I finish a record in time. Stuff like that.

And in addition to working on the scripts and writing and recording all of the music, you actually voice several of the characters, correct? Nathan Explosion, Skwisgaar, Pickles...

Yeah, and the manager, Charles Ofdensen, and the record producer, and the therapist. Usually it's because we're out of actors and out of money, so I just keep throwing myself at the booth. Or I'll throw [series co-creator] Tommy Blacha in there and make him do stuff. He's the guy that does Murderface and Toki. Usually we're up against our own time and budget, so we have to find a way to make our voices sound different.

How *do* you do that? Because they all sound remarkably different.

The whole idea for me was to find three different ranges for me to speak in. Pickles is high, Skwisgaar is kind of in the middle, and Nathan is low. When we're doing stuff in the show, we do it all in one take, basically. So if I'm having a conversation and Nathan is telling Pickles to shut up, it's easy for me to switch voices on the spot. So it's not too difficult. Most people sound the same; their voices are actually not too different. They have a couple qualities that make their voices distinct. It's usually a nasally quality, and their rhythm, the meter of speech. And if you can kind of dial those things in and out, then I think you can sound different.

What's it like creating music for a fictional band? Is it written almost for comedy or do you take it very seriously?

I like the music! I have to dig the music in order for me to actually let it past my door. What I'll do is I'll put myself in the character of the band, and I think they would take it very seriously, even if their lyrics are kind of funny at times. They don't know that it's funny; I think they think it's very serious. But I think ultimately creating music for a fictional band has got to be way better than working with the egos of an entire band because, I mean, it's just me sitting there making decisions going, "Here's the bass part, and here's the guitar part," and I don't have any arguments. Nobody storms out; no one says they can't work under these conditions. It's very easy that way. You just go mad a little bit, but that's cool.

And the music seems to be a huge success even outside of the show…
The first *Dethalbum* is one of the highest selling tablature books of all time. As a kid who sat in his bedroom throughout his high school years with no girlfriend playing guitar all day long, it's cool to see that we have done what I hoped the show would do: reach the guitar audience. And the guitar audience gets that this is a guitar driven show with accurate playing and real guitars and real gear and stuff like that. Last I heard we were right below Led Zeppelin but we beat out *The Best of Van Halen.* We have another tablature book coming out with the second album. They're going to be released on the same day. So, "Here's the record, and here's how you play it."

Well congratulations, you beat Van Halen!
I think that should be the title of the entire article. "I'm better than Van Halen."

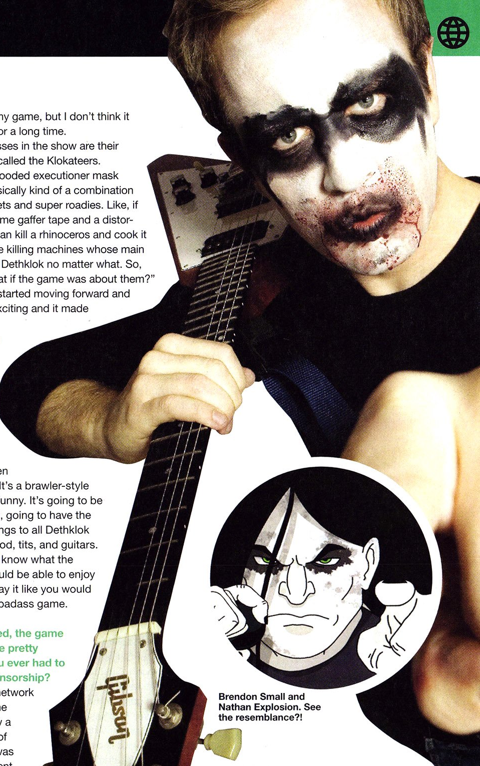
"Brendon Small: Better than Van Halen!" I will definitely consider that. Now, not only have you made a couple albums, but you've done tours with what is essentially the real-life version of Dethklok. Can you tell us a little bit about what it's like to tour with the band?
I don't consider us to be Dethklok when we're on tour. We're playing the music of Dethklok and we're going to sound exactly like the record because it's me and the same drummer, with another guitarist and a bass player. But we are just a partial component of what the live show is because we're playing to a gigantic movie-theater size screen of animation behind us that's a full-length story that we're telling. The way that I have been describing it is that it's like a big stupid Disney ride but kinda like with fire. So it should be as fun as going to Universal Studios or Disneyland or something, but there's metal and blood and fire and all that stuff that makes Rock 'n' Roll cool. It's a really fun show. And we will be doing a tour this fall to coincide with the record release, the new season, and the game that we're putting out there.

Speaking of the *Metalocalypse* game, can you tell me a little bit more about that?
My whole goal was to make sure that the game would totally fit in with the world of Dethklok and make sense. People wanted to make a hack-'n'-slash kind of like brawler with Dethklok just mercilessly killing people. What they didn't realize is that on the show, we're very careful to make sure that Dethklok are not murderers. If death happens, it's accidental around them. The truth is, Dethklok isn't the most brutal thing in the show. Dethklok represents five narcissistic super-baby celebrities that can't do anything for themselves. They were once tough, but their celebrity has turned them into softies. I don't know if that's a good game: watch them spend money? Watch them bark orders at people or throw sandwiches back at their butler's face? It would be a funny game, but I don't think it would be funny for a long time.

The true badasses in the show are their roadies. They're called the Klokateers. They're like the hooded executioner mask guys who are basically kind of a combination of the Green Berets and super roadies. Like, if you give them some gaffer tape and a distortion pedal, they can kill a rhinoceros and cook it for dinner. They're killing machines whose main goal is to protect Dethklok no matter what. So, we thought, "What if the game was about them?" Then everything started moving forward and it became very exciting and it made a lot of sense.

So, your job in the game is to be this Klokateer and graduate into the higher ranks of protecting the band, and you'll be given all these orders. It's a brawler-style game. It's really funny. It's going to be incredibly violent, going to have the big important things to all Dethklok projects: fire, blood, tits, and guitars. Even if you don't know what the show is, you should be able to enjoy this game and play it like you would like a really cool badass game.

As you mentioned, the game and the show are pretty violent. Have you ever had to deal with any censorship?
The head of the network came to me at one point, and he saw a rough animation of one thing and it was a particularly violent episode that later I was also like, "This is not even funny, this is just gross!" But he definitely said, "Does it have to be that violent?" And the answer is no, the show doesn't have to be that violent. He was definitely concerned about that, but as far as regulations and what not, we can pretty much get away with flaying a guy's face in half and spraying his blood onto children or whatever. As long we don't show consensual sex, pelvic thrusting, anything like that. We can't do any sex stuff, but we can easily kill a baby.



Brendon Small and Nathan Explosion. See the resemblance?!

TOP 5 VDS DOWNLOADS

- *STREET FIGHTER: THE LEGEND OF CHUN-LI*
- *12 ROUNDS* UNRATED
- *GRAN TORINO*
- *FRIDAY THE 13TH*
- *FANBOYS*

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Manly Covers, and the Moral Minority

87

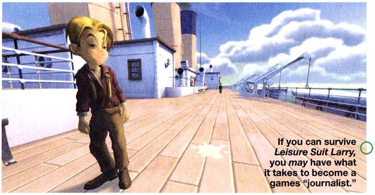
Number of sodas consumed by the PTOM staff during the making of this issue

6

Number of people who claimed to have eaten a spoonful of cinnamon after reading the "Lightning Round" letter in the July issue

0

Number of people who provided proof of said feat



If you can survive *Leisure Suit Larry,* you *may* have what it takes to become a games "journalist."

THE WRITE STUFF

I just graduated from public school and started to wonder what path I should take as a career. Now, I have a lot of anonymous writing experience for many extra curricular projects, and it is my passion. Without a doubt, I am a very good writer for my age. I also have a passion for gaming, and as such, I thought later on in life I could find a job that combines the two—possibly a game scriptwriter or maybe even a PTOM writer! Is there any way that I can get started or get involved?

Goodmangamerguy, via email

First you need to master the art of using horrible puns as headlines. Beyond that, there are quite a few things you can and absolutely should be doing if you want to pursue a career in games journalism... well, "journalism." Number one: keep writing and keep playing (demos, downloads, anything to further understand what pieces make great games). Write for whoever you can to hone your skills and to build your portfolio. Use that experience to land a job as an intern somewhere. This is easily the best way to get your foot in the door (both Scott and Teresa started as interns!). But most importantly, remember that game-related jobs aren't just about games. You need to be passionate about the actual product you're creating, not just the subject matter. Games like *Leisure Suit Larry* don't review themselves, you know.

ONLY SKIN DEEP

I enjoy your magazine very much, but the biggest thing I notice in your reviews is that you bash or

LETTER OF THE MONTH

TROPHY LAW

DEVELOPERS! Please, think your Trophies through. I just finished *Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena* (what a fabulous game). After cleaning up the single-player Trophies, I decided to start on the multiplayer. After all, two-thirds of that Trophy list is online. Zero games found for Deathmatch. Oh well, I'll just do an "any game" search. Zero games found. Tomorrow will be better. Zero games found. Why would you make such a multiplayer-heavy Trophy set when obviously your multiplayer must have sucked?! Anyway, that got me thinking. Here is my list of Trophy sins:

1) Don't create a multiplayer heavy Trophy list when there's no real online support *(Chronicles of Riddick, FEAR 2).*
2) If I beat Hard mode, unlock the Normal Trophy too already! *(Battlefield: Bad Company).*
3) No "friends only" Ranked matches—make players work for their Trophies *(Killzone 2).*
4) But at the same time, don't make me dedicate my life to your game *(Resistance 2,* specifically the 10,000 online kills Trophy).
5) With all the modders and glitchers online, multiplayer Trophies should only truly be included for co-op experiences *(Call of Duty: World at War* got this one right; kudos to you, Treyarch).

There are many, many others, but these are the five cardinal sins. Anyway, that's my take.

Guy, via email

That's not a bad list, Guy. We're not entirely with you on the "co-op only" multiplayer Trophies and we understand why developers place such an emphasis on online play (they want to encourage you to keep playing the game they worked so hard to create!), but overall, those are some good rules. We'd also like to add, "Don't be lazy and just give us a Trophy every time we finish a mission/level." Creative Trophies are so much more fun to unlock!

"Why would you make such a multiplayer-heavy Trophy set when obviously your multiplayer must have sucked?!" →

praise games based mostly on their graphics. I have something to tell you: graphics don't make a game good. What makes a game good (for me at least) is the storyline, gameplay, and controls, which is why I buy from game companies that have been around since the arcade era (SEGA, Nintendo, Namco, Atari). You know, the big names.

Benungol, via email

Last issue, it was release dates. This issue, it's graphics. Come on people! What reviews are you reading? And do you really think a company's age determines the quality of its games? *Really?*

CHIC ACCESSORIES FOR FASHIONABLE GAMERS

I am but a humble gamer enjoying the glory that is *inFamous.* But watching Cole from behind as I send him through his good/evil deeds, I noticed something: Cole may or may not have the most badass backpack ever. (And by "may or may not," I mean it totally *is*). I doubt that I am the only one who finds this bag incredibly amazing. Amazing enough to buy…BUY! Like, with money! I know you guys have some pull around the industry and might be able to convince someone, somewhere to make this happen.

David, via email

Sorry David, but as far as we know, no one is working on an *inFamous* backpack. Knowing Sony, though, they'll probably be willing to sell you one in Home pretty soon (zing!). In the mean time, enjoy the fact that this *Mirror's Edge* bag exists. It's pretty amazing, too.

WHO'S THERE?

In the PTOM AUG 09 issue your preview of *Army of Two: The 40th Day* says its fopr the PSP!!!! KNOCK KNOCK! ITS NOT!!!!! TYPO!!! TYPO!!! I Winnnn! U lose!!

Ur #3 Fan, via email

You know, #3, when we get a letter like this one, we all lose. Also, you messed up that knock-knock joke. For your inexcusable transgressions you are hereby demoted to fan #1,028,466.

THINK PINK

I opened my mailbox today and couldn't believe you finally did it! Your pink cover is amazing (I'm giddy just thinking about it again)! Yes, I know it is a stupid observation, but hey, I needed to write something really dumb to fit in with your crappy letters section. But I don't want to end this letter on a bad note…because I really liked your pink cover.

Geoffrey, via email

I'm an English exile living in the boondocks of west Texas, love gaming, and have subscribed for quite a while now to PTOM, but having to pull out a pink-colored magazine from my mail box in front of oil workers, hunters, and assorted tobacco-chewing hard-asses was disconcerting to say the least. Sniggers, pointing, and sideways glances are the norm because of my accent, but the now additional wolf whistles have left my sexuality in question amongst the townsfolk despite my wife and kids. Man up, chums. Blood, gore, war—any manly depictions of general mayhem will do. Because the next time something girly appears on the front of this fantastic magazine, I may have to purchase Kevlar just to get my mail.

Mike "I Hate Pink" Goudge, via email

When my dad walked into the house this morning with my latest issue of PTOM, he took one look at the cover and gave me a very bad look. I had to explain to him that this magazine does not in any way constitute porn. Your picture of Lightning from *Final Fantasy XIII* created yet another problem in an already stressful day. If I wanted that kind of excitement every month, I'd sign up for *Playboy* instead of PTOM.

Alex O, via email

OK, only sweaty men on the cover from now on, we promise. Thanks for the feedback!

PlayStation 3
PlayStation Portable
PlayStation Network
PlayStation 2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
AUGUST 09
WORLD FIRST
FINAL FANTASY XIII
Spells! Monsters! Potions! Everything revealed!
EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4
Bloodied, battered, bruised, and loving it!
OMG! IT'S THE NEW PSP
New games + features inside
+ Bayonetta Wolfenstein Madden 10 Previewed
20 CHEAP TROPHIES YOU CAN'T RESIST (for cheaters only)
Future

FINAL FANTASIES

With all the hype about the new *Final Fantasy* games, is there any hope for a *FFVII* remake for the PS3? They've had spin-offs galore, but it would be *so amazing* to go through the battle with Emerald Weapon again, only with a thousand-times better graphics…not that I want to see Aerith die again. So have you guys heard anything?

Nik, via email

It's not going to happen. Ever. So stop asking and just be grateful that you can now download *FFVII* from the PlayStation Store.

"Your picture of Lightning from *Final Fantasy XIII* created yet another problem in an already stressful day. If I wanted that kind of excitement every month, I'd sign up for *Playboy*…"

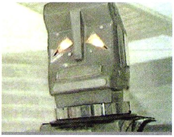
That a sword you're sportin' there, Cloud, or did you just check out PTOM's *FFXIII* issue?

Overheard this month in the PTOM offices:

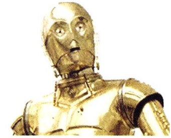
“*Cosmo* taught me that it’s okay to cry!”
[The women’s magazine, not the tasty cocktail.]

Domo Arigato!

Robots launched an unprovoked attack on the Reviews intro page of our August issue, but fortunately for everyone, tech-savvy reader MYLES LIU was able to identify all of the assailants. Congratulations, Myles! Expect a collection of random crap from Rob’s desk in the near future. Everyone else: better luck this month!



“The first robot is Marvin from *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.* This one’s from the old TV show, though, not the more recent movie. Marvin is full of LOLs, so he’s at the top…



Obviously, this is C-3PO from *Star Wars*. He was always kind of useless and kind of annoying, so he’s in the middle. R2-D2 totally would have been at the top…

This is a robot from the hilariously bad movie *Chopping Mall*. I don’t think the robots actually had a name, but the movie was terrible, so they definitely belong at the bottom…

They are related because they are all robots, and you guys probably picked robots as the theme because of *Terminator Salvation.*”

PS TUBE

I am sending this message from my PS3’s Internet browser, and I think that there should be some kind of software update that allows gamers to put their EyeCreate videos or any videos stored on the hard drive directly onto YouTube. That would be so awesome because I use the PS3’s Internet browser a lot, and I have no videos currently on my YouTube channel. Isn’t there a way?

Austin, via email

Technically, there probably is a way, but both Sony and YouTube would need to create ways to support this functionality, which obviously makes the whole thing more complicated and, therefore, less likely to happen. However, you can just drop any videos you make in EyeCreate onto a USB flash card, transfer them to your computer, and then upload them to YouTube from there.

MINI-INTERN… MINTERN?

I’m really frustrated because my mom says she won’t get me a PlayStation 3 until my PS2 breaks down. So I was wondering if I could get a temporary job to save up enough for a PS3. I am 13, good in all subjects, and will run my legs off getting coffee if I have to.

Justin, via email

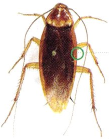
We admire your work ethic, Justin. Maybe Carlos can pass the intern torch to you someday, but not until you learn that it’s never okay to spell “you” without the Y and the O.

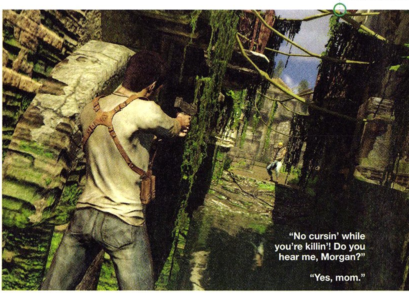
DEBUG YOUR SYSTEM

OK, last month my PS3 stopped reading discs and just gave me an error message, though the system seemed to work great. I called Sony about the problem, and they said to send it in so they would fix it, so I did. On my birthday, I received my system and was very happy until I opened the box and got the dreaded “Voided Warranty” letter. The reason for the void: “Neglect,” though my PS3 looked great and only had minor scratches. So I called Sony again; they said they were going to fix it, BUT…as soon as they opened it, a swarm of cockroaches started running out. They refused to fix it, sent back the roach hive, and included a letter along with the warranty letter saying, “Do not send it back, please.” It’s no fun being PS3-less.

Caleb Savage, via email

You certainly picked a strange place to store your cockroaches, Caleb.





“No cursin’ while you’re killin’! Do you hear me, Morgan?”

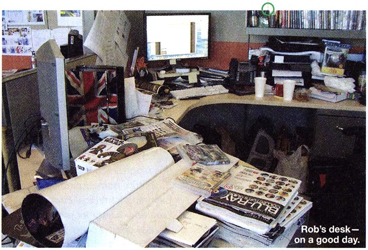
“Yes, mom.”

YOUR MOM IS A CLASSY LADY!

Why can’t they make more adventure games that don’t involve blood, drugs, and sex? I just want a clean game that’s fun for adults as well. Sometimes I get sick of hearing the F-bomb dropped all the time. Man alive, I just want clean! Can’t there be a dang filter on PS3 or something? Would it be that hard for all the games to add a filter? If *Duke Nukem* has filters, why can’t other games? What’s so hard about it?

Morgan Cross, via email

Wait, so violence is still acceptable? Like, it’s cool to shoot people in the face so long as they don’t bleed or swear or get naked? Isn’t that a bit of a



Rob’s desk—on a good day.

contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. ’cause Teresa’s tired of doin’ all the thinkin’ and commentin’ ’round here.

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double standard? Anyways... any T-rated action-adventure game (like *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*) should be tame enough to keep you happy. The ESRB specifically screens for objectionable material like sex and drugs—although the occasional reference to "rock 'n' roll" may inadvertently slip through... you've been warned!

THE DESK THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

I just have a quick question: in almost every issue, you reward a lucky winner by giving him stuff from Rob's desk. I'm not saying it's a bad thing, I'm just wondering: how much stuff does Rob have on his desk?! I mean he's going to run out of stuff eventually, right? And another thing, why from Rob's desk? Why not from Roger, Ken, Scott, or Teresa's?

Denis B, via email

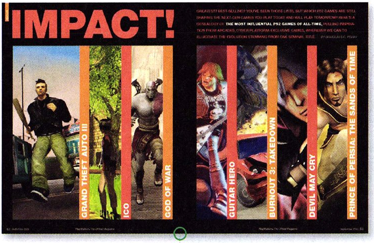
Have you *seen* Rob's desk? Oh wait, you probably haven't. Alright, well behold the unending abyss of stuff that is his desk.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

I'm thoroughly pissed off at you guys. The highest system I own is a PS2, and in the past couple issues, you didn't even mention a PS2 game. Every time I read about a great game in your magazine, I get really excited about it, but then I look to see if there's a PS2 version and 99 out of 100 times, you don't even mention if one exists. It would be nice if you would not only say if there *is* a PS2 version but tell us if it's as good as the PS3 version—or if it's even close (because we both know a PS2 version will never be as good as the PS3 version).

Dustin M, via email

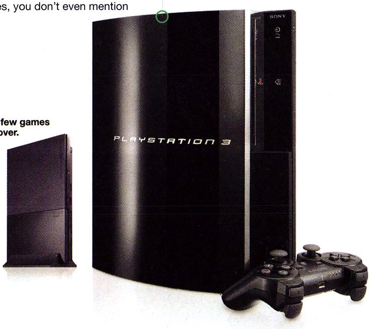
We hate to be the bearers of bad news, but many times, we don't mention the PS2 version because there *isn't* a PS2 version. Both Sony and the majority of the third-party developers are understandably focusing their attention on the PS3, leaving the PS2 with only table scraps and movie games. But we try to give the PS2 love when we can [see page 64 of this issue]. And did you read the "Most Influential PS2 Games of All-Time" feature in our September issue?



IMPACT!

GREATEST? BEST-SELLING? YOU'VE SEEN THOSE LISTS, BUT WHICH PS2 GAMES ARE STILL SHAPING THE NEXT-GEN GAMES YOU PLAY TODAY AND WILL PLAY TOMORROW? HERE'S A GENEALOGY OF **THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PS2 GAMES OF ALL-TIME,** PULLING INSPIRATION FROM ARCADES, OTHER PLATFORM-EXCLUSIVE GAMES, WHEREVER WE CAN TO ILLUSTRATE THE EVOLUTION STEMMING FROM ONE SEMINAL TITLE. BY DOUGLASS C. PERRY

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
ICO
GOD OF WAR
GUITAR HERO
BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
DEVIL MAY CRY
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME



PS2 few games to cover.

LOST ILLUSIONS

Do you think that Sony will assign a money value for Trophies earned? Xbox achievements earn the player Xbox Live gamer points. Do you think that Sony will do the same?

Joshua Scipioni, via email

We hate to break it to you, Joshua, but Microsoft Points and Gamer Score points are not the same thing...meaning Xbox gamers are not slowly earning money by unlocking Achievements. Though Sony said they have no plans, we wouldn't be surprised if some kind of rewards program (like airline miles) made its way to PSN a year or so from now. For the here and now, wouldn't it be nice if they rewarded us with *something* when we reached a certain level? A custom theme, a T-shirt in Home...anything really. Maybe someday.

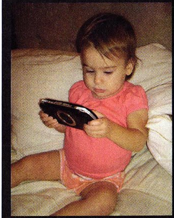
SPEAK YOUR MIND

I have a bone to pick with Sony: Why is it that the Xbox can have private chat while playing and we can't? Anyone at PlayStation Mag know if this is in the works for the PS3? Because let me tell ya, it would come in handy...

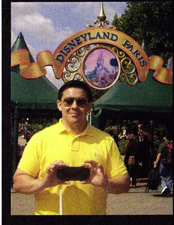
Jose Rivera, Bethlehem PA

We don't know anything official, Jose, but Sony is constantly working on the next firmware update and fans have been clamoring for this (and several other features). So it's bound to happen at some point... we just can't tell you when for sure.

Your monthly dose of PSPs and Babies



Who would have thought that you readers would have kids so consistently? This month's PTOM baby comes to us from Maurizio who told us, "Just a couple of days ago, I stepped away from my room to grab something, and when I returned, I found my daughter, Melania Rose, playing with my PSP. I quickly rushed to take a picture! I think we have a future Sony fan in the works!"

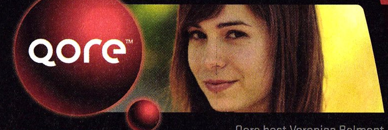


Reader Saul Lobos also has a kid, but we decided not to use the photo of him and his son. Instead, we're printing the picture of him and his PSP in front of the Disneyland Paris entrance! Sorry for leaving your kid out, Saul, but look... Disneyland! In France! You sure know how to treat your PSP right.

Haiku of the Month:

Summer time is here
I can finally play games!
Wait...new releases?

Steve Mills, NY

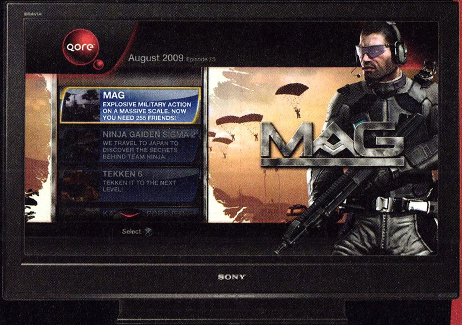


Presented by the PlayStation Network

Qore host Veronica Belmont

QORE EPISODE 15

Featuring MAG, Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2, Tekken 6 and Katamari Forever



MAG
EXPLOSIVE MILITARY ACTION ON A MASSIVE SCALE. NOW YOU NEED 255 FRIENDS!

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 2
WE TRAVEL TO JAPAN TO DISCOVER THE SECRETS BEHIND TEAM NINJA.

TEKKEN 6
TEKKEN IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL!

One of the most highly anticipated PS3 titles shown at this year's E3 was *MAG*. Qore sent Veronica Belmont to Seattle to get the 411 on this ambitious shooter, and we're certain you'll be impressed with the scope of the game. But the U.S. of A isn't the only place to find great games, of course—Veronica and Audrey Cleo also visited Japan this month to see what's coming our way courtesy of Namco and Tecmo.

Plus

All subscribers and purchasers will receive exclusive PS3 themes this month, and there's a new *Rune Raider* level pack in the Qore Arcade.

AVAILABLE NOW!
Download on the PlayStation™ Network.

Featuring

Massive Action

If anyone can pull off a 256-player online shooter, it's got to be the developer behind the *SOCOM* franchise. Learn more about this upcoming PS3 exclusive and see how good Veronica is at taking orders…

Ninja Hijinks

Tecmo's Team Ninja has added new playable characters, new bosses, and an online co-op mode to make the latest *Ninja Gaiden* game a new experience for PS3 owners.

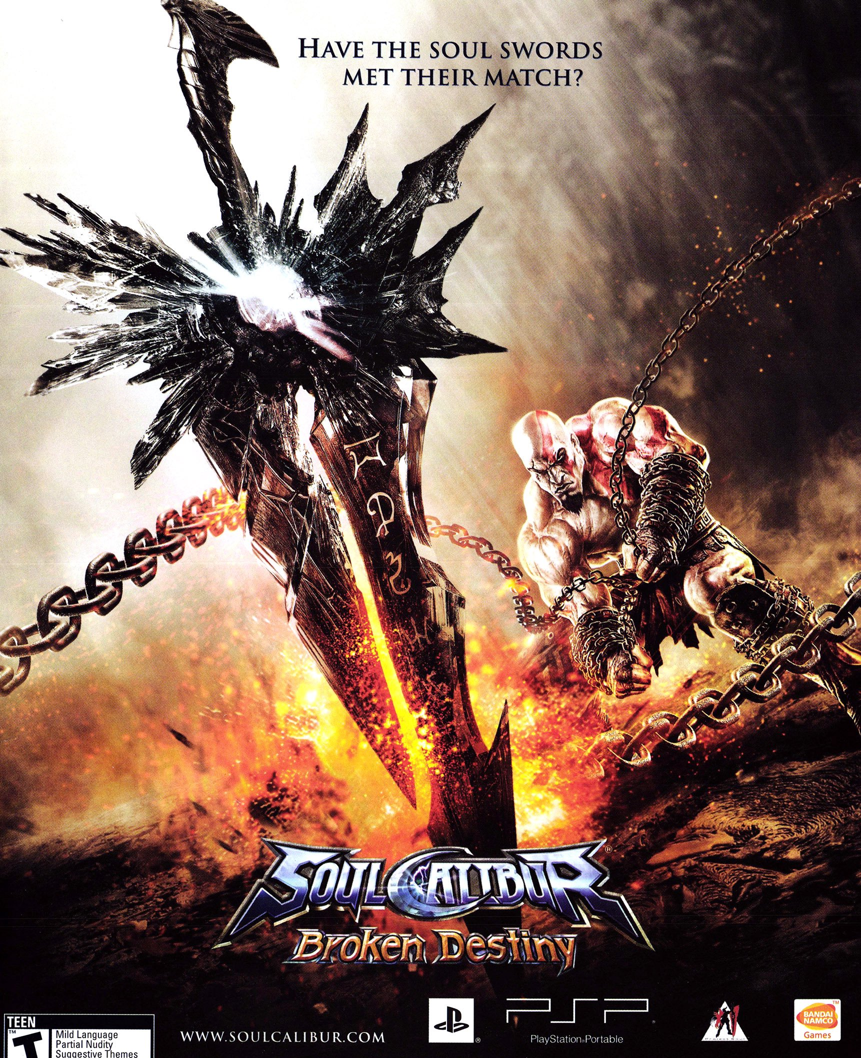
Tekken it to the Next Level

Namco's storied fighting franchise returns to the current generation of consoles with an expanded character roster and a new "scenario campaign" mode. Can you say multiplayer versus a giant robot? Sweet!

Photograph by Mark Madeo

Having a Ball

The *Katamari* franchise keeps rolling along—this time featuring HD visuals, a remixed soundtrack and a few gameplay twists to keep things funky and fresh.


HAVE THE SOUL SWORDS
MET THEIR MATCH?
SOULCALIBUR®
Broken Destiny

TEEN

T™

Mild Language
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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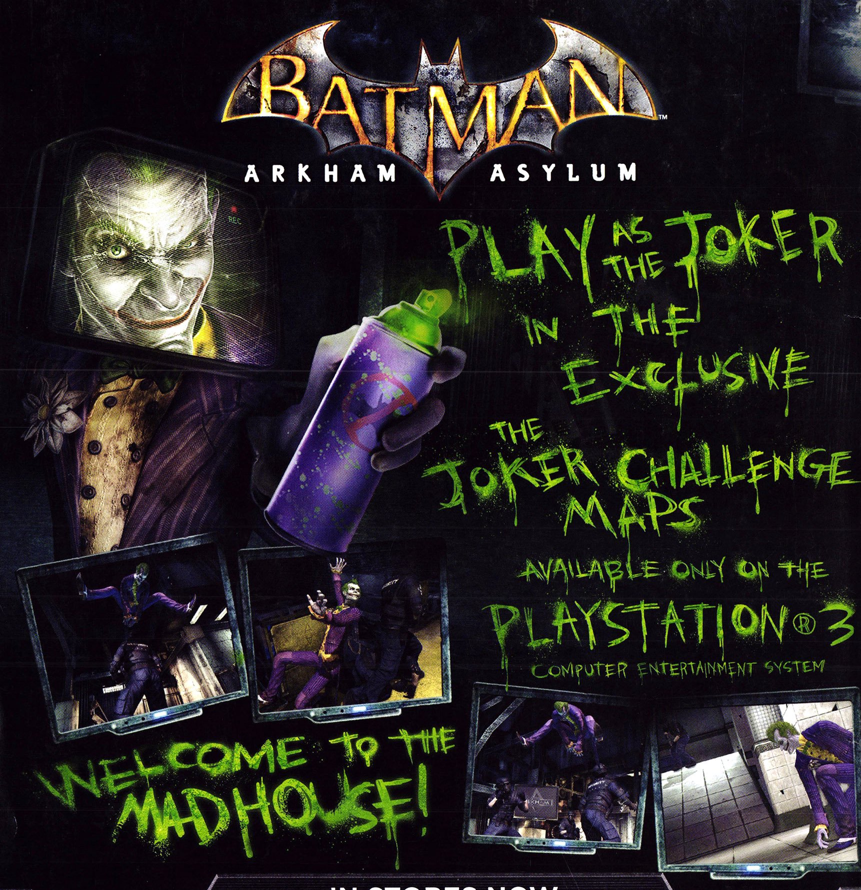
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Blood
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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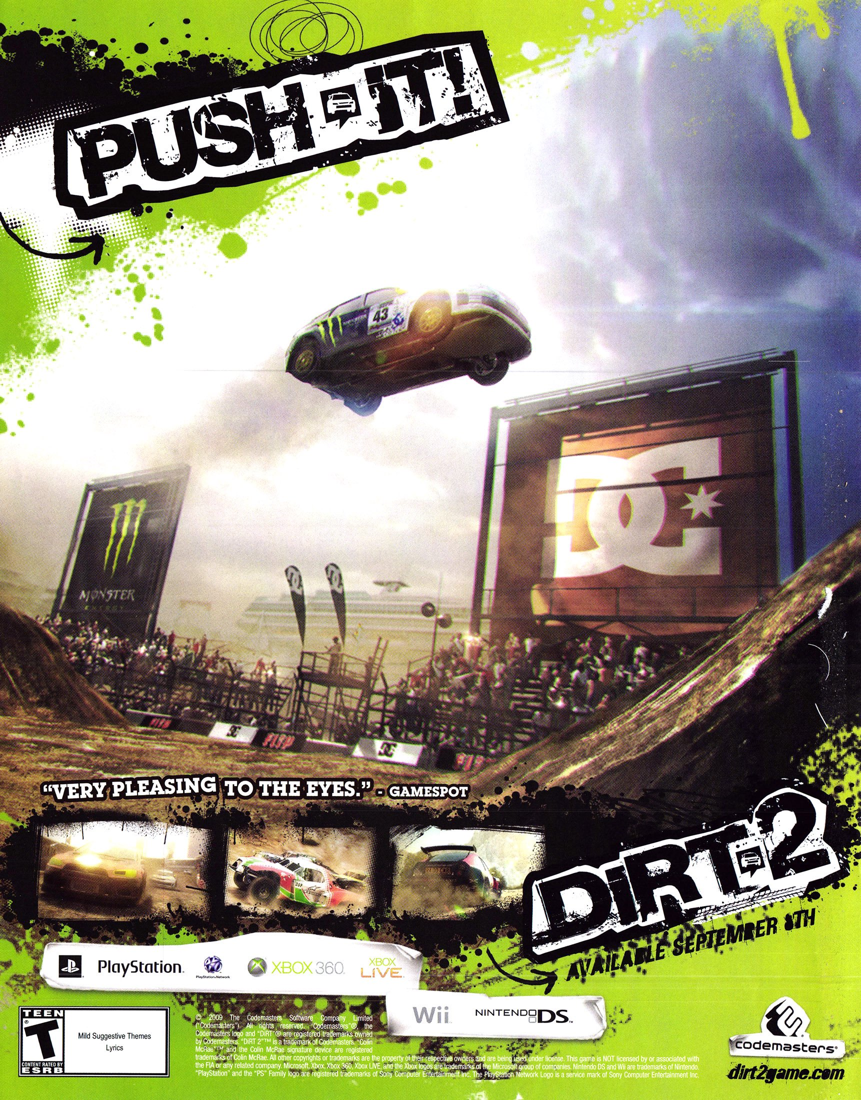
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PlayStation
PlayStation Network
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
Wii
NINTENDO DS
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